Some parts rotten

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/37065088.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Abigail Hobbs
Additional Tags:	Hannibal (TV) Season/Series 01, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Obsessive Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham Has Encephalitis, Hannibal Lecter Loves Will Graham, in his own way, Alternate Season/Series 01, Graphic Depictions of Illness, Vomiting, Fever, Hurt/Comfort, Hannibal Lecter is a Cannibal, Panic Attacks, Hospitals, Medical Procedures, Autistic Will Graham, mentions of BDSM, Caring Hannibal Lecter, Food, Nightmares, Canon-Typical Violence, Fluff, Hair Washing, Hallucinations, Rape/Non-con Elements, Will Graham Has Nightmares, Object Insertion, Medical Trauma, Medical Kink, is the non-consensual element, Blood, Blood Kink, Knife Kink, Blood Drinking, Blindfolds, those are consensual, Implied/Referenced Character Death, Abigail Hobbs Dies, or does she?, Someone Help Will Graham, Frottage, Hand Jobs, On the Run, graphic descriptions of Poland
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2022-02-12 Updated: 2022-05-07 Words: 24,344 Chapters: 9/?

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by lecterova

Summary

Hannibal is forced to reveal the truth of Will's encephalitis diagnosis sooner than he expected when it suddenly escalates into a medical emergency. However, he's not one to be discouraged, whatever events unfold; his plans are bound to go back on track one way or the other.

An AU of season 1 with a suffering Will and an obsessed Hannibal. More tags will be added with new chapters.

Notes

Title from 'Love Is Taking Me Over' by Mariam the Believer.

Chapter 1

„I don't think I'm ok at all," was all Will Graham managed to utter under his nose before covering his mouth with his hand and running to the bathroom.

The next thing he registered was feeling like he was going to die right then and there, on the floor of doctor Lecter's bathroom for patients; if the vomiting didn't get him, and it sure felt like it could, he was pretty sure the symptoms he was experiencing were those of a stroke. Or, more generally speaking, a medical emergency of some kind, culminating the various strange things that have been happening to him for the past few weeks. What a way to go at the ripe age of thirty five.

Then, as his brain was seemingly exploding all over his skull and the upper parts of his spine, there were hands on him, and Will felt a little less like dying. Warm, dry hands on his sticky forehead, his sticky lips and sticky shoulders. Hands pushing a cold glass into his sticky ones. That would normally warrant embarrassment, but for now all Will could feel was relief that someone was going to save him from impending doom.

That was an emotion the presence of Hannibal Lecter stirred in him even in less dire circumstances. Not that his current ones seemed all that troubling, now that he could actually focus on anything other than a vision of throwing up all of his internal organs and, God forbid, clogging the pipes.

"Just a warning," he choked out in between one shaky breath and another, struggling to cling to consciousness. "I might pass out soon."

His palms were gently squeezed and lifted up to his chin, then he was lovingly waterboarded, as that was the only effect Lecter achieved while attempting to hydrate him.

"It appears you a have a high fever," Hannibal explained in a tone which implied that information was intended to be comforting. Will couldn't figure out which part could possibly provide comfort. Maybe it was the one where Hannibal started wiping his face and neck with a wet, cold towel. It should've been unpleasant, but Will was relieved. Not only would he be cleaned of any organic remains on his face, he really must've been feverish, as he was only then realising how hot he felt.

"This doesn't feel like mental illness," he let out a dry chuckle. That part, that part right there was how his fever could be comforting. It didn't come with psychosis. And the cold droplets of water running down his spine and raising every hair on his body made him feel more grounded than he's been in weeks.

"I seriously doubt it is."

Lecter moved the towel to Will's left cheek and temple, wiping away traces of snot and tears.

"Could be poisoning," Will gasped for air, consumed by another dizzy spell and a wave of nausea it brought. "Carbon… monoxide, or something. A gas leak."

“Your dogs would be dead by now, unless the poison had been put directly in your food.”

In a moment of blind, irrational panic Will wanted to get up, get in his car and save the dogs, undoubtedly on the brink of death by carbon monoxide poisoning, or at least send Hannibal there. All his attempt at getting his legs under him managed to achieve was throwing up the last pathetic bit of moisture he had left in his body.

Hannibal grabbed Will’s shoulder to support him and drew his hair away from his forehead. “This has been going on for weeks, Will. It’s nothing in your house and very unlikely to be poison.”

“What the hell… God. What the hell doesn’t show up on a brain scan except mental illness?”

“Migraines?” Hannibal’s voice lingered in the air; either he was unconvinced or it just echoed strangely in the corridor. Will felt like his head had been shoved underwater and it took him a while to realise Hannibal was no longer on the bathroom floor with him. Then suddenly, not a second later, he was back and standing right behind him, moving without a sound. “Auras can cause hallucinations. It’s rare, but entirely possible and well documented.”

“This is a migraine?”

“Could be, but your fever shouldn’t be getting quite this high.” Hannibal crouched down; Will could feel his warm breath as he spoke. It felt threatening, but at the same time comforting against his skin, which was dripping with cold sweat. He barely registered an old-fashioned mercury thermometer made of glass extended towards him. “Put this under your arm.”

“What if I crush it?”

“You won’t. I’ve been using it for years.”

“Shouldn’t a doctor have newer equipment lying around?” Will struggled to push the thermometer under his many layers of clothing with shaking hands. Hannibal smiled, probably figuring that if Will had the energy to be snarky he might not die for the next few minutes.

The truth was, Will didn’t know how much longer he’d be able to cling to consciousness, but at least Hannibal’s voice worked as an anchor to bring him back if he drifted too far away. That’s what Will was trained to do back when he was a cop and still had to interact with people; if someone was about to pass out, you had talked to them in a gentle but stern voice, told them a story, asked questions to help them focus.

“This type of thermometer has always worked the best for me.” Hannibal picked up the cold washcloth and started dabbing it gently on Will’s forehead, temples, his neck. “Besides, it’s not every day I do house visits in my own office. In case you haven’t noticed, my work rarely includes taking someone’s temperature.”

“If only it was that easy, huh?” Will closed his eyes and leaned back against the wall, allowing Hannibal to keep wiping away at his clammy skin. God knows he needed some

cleaning. And it's not like Will could do anything but focus on taking deep breaths and not retch for the four minutes it took for the ancient device to do its deed. Hannibal had probably brought the wretched thing all the way from Europe, back in the 80s or whenever it was that he'd immigrated to the US. Or he's had it custom made at some Swiss thermometer manufacture and shipped across the ocean.

Will saw the dark water of that very ocean, rocking a ship full of thermometers, Hannibal its captain and a totem made of drowned bodies as its figurehead, then was brought back as someone's hand touched his bare skin, snatching the ancient European machine out of his armpit. Four minutes have passed and in that time Will managed to doze off and have a nightmare. Or a hallucination.

Hannibal was silent as he stared into the glass surface of the thermometer, like he was trying to see the future in a crystal ball. A second Hannibal, darker, crouching in the shadows behind the first one, was staring right at Will.

"I'm taking you to the hospital," said both Hannibals at the same time and their voices reverberated through Will's tortured head. "Do you think you can get up?"

"I can try," Will replied, but couldn't tell whether he said it out loud or just thought about it very hard. He pushed himself against the bathroom wall, and it seemed like he would succeed, until the world disappeared in a flash of light and a thundering sound.

*

When he opened his eyes, he was welcomed by the sight of Hannibal's sleeping face and the sensation of Hannibal's hand cradling his. For a second Will thought he was comatose Abigail Hobbs, looking at the world through her eyes at the moment when he walked in on Lecter keeping watch over her. Then he realised that first, they weren't in a hospital room, and second, Abigail's arm was definitely less hairy the last time he saw it.

His name was Will Graham, fuck knows what time it was, and he was most likely in Baltimore, Maryland, at the house of one doctor Hannibal Lecter, who stayed up watching over him until he fell asleep in his chair. Because that's what he did for people, because he was a good person.

There was IV slowly dripping its way into Will's veins through a catheter in the back of his right palm, the one Hannibal was holding. There was no label on the bag, but it must've been painkillers or antiemetics, since Will felt nothing like the last night he remembered. Either that, or he just woke up from a two year long coma. He wouldn't even complain. At least some of his problems must've been solved in the span of two years; and there would be at least one person who hasn't left him. Will didn't think he had the mental capacity to comprehend the amount of kindness it would take for someone to look after him while he was in a coma, but if anyone would do it, it'd be Hannibal, right? Not counting the dogs, he was the closest person in Will's life.

His hand twitched at the thought, and Hannibal must've felt it, because he slowly opened his eyes, blinking sleep away, and passed Will a soft smile. Hannibal always had a smile for everybody, no matter how tired.

„You're awake," he whispered. „What a relief."

"Sorry about that. Did you stay up all night here with me?"

"Oh, not at all," Hannibal glanced at his wristwatch. "The night's not over yet. You've barely slept for forty minutes."

"So it's…" Wil frowned. It was hard to focus. Must've been the meds. Or the lingering headache. Or whatever condition has been consuming his body and had culminated in an explosion last night. This night. "10 p.m.?"

Hannibal blinked twice and gently slid out his palm from underneath Will's with a sigh.

"It's currently 4:30 a.m. I figured you wouldn't remember some of our visit to the ER, but this is worrying."

Hannibal didn't need to tell him twice. The periods of time he didn't remember kept getting longer. He was curious whether whatever had been done to him at the ER would make any improvements, or if the doctors didn't find anything and his vomiting, fever and shakes were all psychosomatic, a symptom of the worst case of psychosis in recorded history. And that wasn't even the worst.

Will hated spending the night anywhere other than at home with his dogs, single motel rooms being the absolute worst case scenario, and now he's gone and overstayed his welcome not even at Hannibal's office, but his house, possibly his own bedroom. Will also made him drive all the way to the hospital and back home and didn't let him get any sleep. He'd have to go back soon, and he was certain the doctor would fuss over him, try to convince him to stay until the next day and then insist on seeing him all the way home.

How soon would he even be able to go home? When the IV ended? Maybe Hannibal could drive him to the office when he'd have his first patients, so that Will could pick up his car. He had to look after the dogs. They didn't get fed last night.

"Thank you for taking care of me," he muttered. "Did they find out what was wrong at the hospital?"

"You have encephalitis." Hannibal got up from his armchair and proceeded to adjust something on Will's IV. "A pretty advanced case, too. It was the last moment to start treatment before it caused permanent damage."

Will was unsure what kind of permanent damage was associated with encephalitis, but the thought of having to question his reality forever sent a familiar shiver down his spine; the same one he felt when he climbed out of the MRI machine to find out there was nothing physically wrong with him, and then later, when he saw Jack reacting to Georgia Madchen's mother talk of managing expectations.

It was alright now. Everything was ok. He had a physical illness and whatever was in the IV would cure him.

“That doesn’t show up on MRI scans?”

“It should. But sometimes test results can be misleading. Tremors or seizures could have produced an unclear picture.”

He wasn’t mentally ill. Everything was going to be ok. He’d take some pills for a week and then be good as new to return to work. He couldn’t quite shake off the unease that’s plagued him for the past few months, but that was to be expected. He was exhausted, sleep-deprived, and still not healed.

“So what now? Did I get a prescription?”

“Yes, in fact, for a hospital stay under observation. As well as some steroids and immunotherapy, which is the part I can provide you with.”

“What happened to the hospital stay?”

Hannibal stopped midway to a coffee table, where he had a tray with a glass and a water bottle ready.

“You had an episode when the staff tried to have you admitted. I figured taking you home would be a cause for less distress than leaving you in a strange place under sedation.” He picked up the tray and placed it on the nightstand at Will’s side. He must’ve been completely exhausted, but it barely showed on his face. Anyone else in the doctor’s situation would look like a dead man walking. “You have an oversensitivity to light, don’t you?”

Light. White light flashing in his head, then in his eyes. Please, Hannibal, please, take me with you. I’m going to die if you leave me here, you can’t just let me die. Lights flashing above him. Let’s just go to the car now, ok, Hannibal? You’ll take me with you? Let’s go, I’m begging you, I’m actually begging you, just take me to the car and let’s leave.

Lights going off and it’s alright, Will, and quiet now, and oh dear. And I’m going to take care of you. We’re going home. I have all we need back home.

Both of them kneeling on the cold, white floor. Hannibal cradling his face in his palms, forcing Will to look at him. Hannibal embracing him and then just rocking him in his arms like a little frightened child, Will holding onto him for dear life. How many people saw that? He found himself really appreciating the physical, palpable diagnosis of his brain just eating itself. The little episode was a one-time thing. He was going to be healed and never start a scene in public ever again, most often by simply avoiding said public as much as humanly possible.

“Sorry about that.”

“It wasn’t your fault. I’ve seen worse panic attacks in people who weren’t boiling alive with fever.”

“Well, you’ve gone through more than enough trouble for me already.” Will wiped at his forehead with a sigh. The exhaustion has taken over the confusion and he felt ready to fall

asleep any second. Perhaps he could still get some sleep before Hannibal left for work. They could both use the rest.

“Always glad to keep company.” Hannibal pointed at the glass of water at the nightstand. “You should try drinking some water. You’re being hydrated intravenously, but your throat will be sore from vomiting. Do you need help?”

“I think I’ll manage,” Will muttered, only to be taken aback by the weakness in his hand as he reached for the glass. It felt like trying to swim in molasses. “I’ll be out of your hair when this,” he pointed with his head vaguely towards the IV, sending pain through his stiff neck muscles, “runs out and you can unhook me.”

Hannibal raised his eyebrows at that, but his expression immediately softened with a fond smile.

“You must still be feverish if you think I’m going to let you leave on your own in your state.”

“If you want to drive me so badly, suit yourself,” said Will into his glass of water, even though he was pretty sure where the conversation was going. He wasn’t entirely displeased with the direction, either, if he had to be completely honest with himself. He knew he’d just go back to his old habits the second his symptoms became manageable and neglect the treatment, causing the encephalitis to circle right back into ‘permanent damage’ territory. He could tell Jack, or Alana Bloom, but that’d mean getting another person involved in his medical drama. Hannibal has already declared himself his friend many times, it’d be foolish to decline his offer to help Will get back on his feet, at least until he wasn’t hallucinating forest creatures anymore. “I’ll come by to pick up my car tomorrow.”

“Will, I’m sorry, but you absolutely must stay in bed for at least a week or two. As well as go through at least a dozen of these,” Hannibal mimicked his head gesture, pointing at the mysterious cocktail hooked to Will’s palm. What did he say was the prescription again? Steroids?

“I have six dogs waiting for me at home.” Will didn’t think Hannibal would be willing to temporarily let them move into his pristine suburban mansion, but it was worth a shot.

“I was thinking about taking them to a pet hotel. They’d be taken care of by professionals.”

“Can’t you just feed them for a few days?” Will knew he was asking for too much, considering Hannibal just made a whole obligation to look after him. It felt unfair, too, to make demands of him at the crack of dawn, after a night of driving Will around and nursing his fever. “They’re strays. Some of them aren’t great with strangers.”

“I’ll stop by your house before my appointments in the morning. We should make the decision once we’ve had some sleep.” Hannibal touched Will’s forehead with the back of his hand. “You’re still a little warm. There’s no need for us to further stress you out.”

The notion that there would be any stress in the first place meant the dogs were going to the pet hotel. Will decided to be civil and not push the discussion any further. It couldn’t be that

bad for them if it was just a few days. Surely Hannibal wouldn't mind letting Will go back home and stay in his own bed after that.

Hannibal was right. He didn't even realise how sore his throat was until he washed it down with cool water. He felt like death warmed over. The exhaustion of a sleepless night was getting to him. Contrary to what many people thought, losing consciousness was not the same as deep sleep – it was a strain on the body and one would awaken from it far more tired than before.

Hannibal looked as pristine as always.

What would Will do if Hannibal had a medical emergency at his house? Not much, probably. He had training in pre-medical first aid, but near zero experience and an awkwardness which combined with his social ineptitude could render him useless in a crisis involving suffering human beings. Hannibal, on the other hand, flourished in circumstances such as this. He could handle any emergency with not just professionalism, but grace as well.

"You're right. It can wait. They'll manage, they've been alone before. Thank you for everything. You should catch some sleep."

Hannibal sent him a warm smile, as if grateful that Will has presented him with such mercy, and gave him a reassuring squeeze on his shoulder.

"As soon as you have at least one more sip."

Will obeyed and handed the tray back to Hannibal, but he made no move to leave the room.

"Aren't you going back to bed?"

"I'm afraid I won't be able to sleep where I can't see you. You'll have to put up with me for now." He really brought out the gentlest of smiles he had in his arsenal for this.

"Always glad to keep company."

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> Will is left alone at Hannibal's house and uses the opportunity to snoop around where he shouldn't.

Will dreamt about being Abigail Hobbs.

He was her, but he was Will Graham at the same time, too, trapped in the confines of Abigail Hobbs' body. Suspended in the waters of her pitiful little life, floating in the dark depths between one nightmare and the next. Garrett Jacob Hobbs behind her, Will Graham ahead. Both an outside threat and a part of her at the same, stuck in her skin like a splinter.

The face of her father after he picked up that phone, forever imprinted on her eyelids, always with her, alive again every time she closed her eyes. If she opened them, Will Graham, her strange, neurotic, unpredictable saviour, waiting there with Hannibal Lecter, gentle and kind, but full of secrets. Threatening. Urging her to wake up with their whispers, like snakes, like birds of prey. See? See?

See? See? It's safer here with me. The devil you know is better than the devil you don't.

Who knows what devil hides under Will Graham's skin?

See? See? He hissed at her, at Abigail Hobbs with Will Graham trapped inside her ribs, and it made a sound like a blade slashing a throat.

Pretty standard stuff, all things considered, Will thought when he finally, painstakingly opened his eyes and managed to catch his breath. First thing to greet him was the transparent bag of fluid dripping into his veins. He was in a hospital bed, but not in a hospital. He wasn't Abigail Hobbs waking up from a coma. He was Will Graham, just Will Graham, no one else in his head, and he hasn't slashed anyone's throat that he was aware of.

Hannibal Lecter has taken him back to his own house in Baltimore after Will threw a fit about not wanting to stay at a hospital, where he'd found himself, also thanks to Hannibal, due to a severe case of previously misdiagnosed encephalitis. The only reason he was still alive, and without, as Hannibal put it last night (morning?), permanent damage, was that he happened to start puking his guts out and got a raging fever mid-session at an appointment with the doctor.

And the reason his condition went undiagnosed was likely because of what Hannibal referred to as tremors, and which was a really classy euphemism for Will being, as always, too twitchy.

His headache, stiffness in his neck and nausea were mostly gone now, reduced to more of an unpleasant phantom memory than actual pain, probably thanks both to the mixture of medicine pumped into his veins and actually sleeping for the first time in a while. Nightmares were par for the course, but the dreaded stag-like creature stalking him had yet to make an appearance. Even the talking corpse of Garrett Jacob Hobbs didn't terrorise him nearly as long or with the same intensity as it has been for the past few weeks.

He was alone, which meant Hannibal has either finally gone to sleep in his own bed, or had already started his day. There was no clock in sight. Will's room – Hannibal's room? Guest room? – was dark, but faint rays of pale winter sunshine were peeking in through a gap in the curtains. Morning. Of what was hopefully the next day after last dreadful evening.

Will managed to lift himself up on his elbows and half-sit with his back resting on the pillows. His eyes landed on a large glass cloche, taking over almost the entire nightstand to his right and hiding inside a tray with food, a thermic cup and a note. Will's phone was plugged to a charger next to it. Typical of Hannibal to leave an intricate letter about breakfast instead of just sending a text. He'd probably say it was more personal. He'd be right. Will appreciated the thought.

Removing the cloche and placing it down on the floor without breaking it took Will an amount of work that Hannibal really should've seen coming, though. But that miscalculation was understandable. He was probably exhausted after staying up all night with Will, who didn't even bother remembering it afterwards.

Your name is Will Graham. You're in Baltimore, Maryland, at my house, and you're safe here. Your dogs are taken care of. I'm seeing patients until 5 p.m. Call me immediately if you feel worse or need anything. Enjoy your breakfast. H. L.

The mention of his dogs was the part that really succeeded at making Will feel safer and more at home in this strange environment. He picked up the phone from where it lay, screen down. 10. Will felt confident enough in his presence of mind to try and get up, maybe even risk a trip to the bathroom.

The tedious five step walk to the door on the side of the bed has proven exhausting. On the side of the sink there was a single, brand new toothbrush. Guest bedroom, then. The way it appeared pristine and untouched normally would point towards that first, but not in the case of someone as pedantic as Hannibal Lecter.

Having returned, Will sat down on the bed with a sigh of relief and took in the rest of his new accommodation; knowing he wasn't trespassing in Hannibal's most personal space was priceless. The walls were a blueish shade of dark grey. The sheets on his bed a matching colour. The composition could do terrible things to his brain, were he to start hallucinating again. Will really hoped that whatever medicine he was administered would do its job.

A flawless white rug underneath the bed. Two nightstands on each side. A neatly folded bathrobe and a towel on the chair.

He was still slightly nauseated, but figured starving himself would only make it worse. Hannibal has brought him fresh croissants, because of course he had; there was seemingly no

length he wasn't willing to go to in order to make Will comfortable. Making an extra trip to the bakery in the morning wasn't that much in comparison to creating an impromptu hospital room in his guest bedroom. Did friends normally do those things for each other? Very close friends, yes, obviously. But when Will thought about friends, he would always envision other people, normal people. The ones who ended up beaten and bloody on crime scenes. Somehow, what was normal for others never seemed to apply to Will Graham, and vice versa. Knowing what friendship in its various stages looked like in the interpersonal relationships between murderers, victims and witnesses didn't make him more skilled at recognising them in himself and those near him. At least as near as they could get.

He'd have to mention it to Hannibal. For now, he was going to do his best to enjoy the breakfast. The croissants have been paired with an array of fruit jams, strawberries and blueberries. The only other time anyone has ever made him breakfast was when Hannibal had come to visit him at the motel room that one morning. Will's never managed to achieve that level of intimacy with any partner.

A piece of croissant topped with peach jam got stuck in his throat when he realised his interpretation of this relationship might've been off from the start. He's never had much of an intuition when it came to other people's preferences, but now that the pendulum in his head has swung it became obvious.

Still, preferences aside, it was very unlikely that Will Graham would find himself inside Hannibal Lecter's dating pool. He'd probably need more money and a whole new social life for that. That is, unless Hannibal had a thing for men from a different class background, as out of character as it seemed. And wasn't he more interested in Alana Bloom, much like Will himself? Of course, bisexual people existed; Will reminded himself that he wasn't the only such individual in the world, as he sometimes found himself forced to do. Trying to start an affair with him and Alana Bloom at the same time would be certainly strange, if not downright perverted, but Will could easily imagine someone entertaining such a fantasy.

Someone. Not Hannibal Lecter.

It struck Will how little he knew of the doctor's personal life, even though they've been long past keeping their relationship strictly professional. He was aware of a few friends and colleagues in Hannibal's orbit, he knew he didn't have a family and was seeing a psychiatrist of his own. That was about it. Will had no real way of telling whether Hannibal's interest in him, or Alana for that matter, was sexual in nature. He would have to ask. They've discussed stranger things, but personal matters was the one area in life where Will's mind failed him.

He managed to finish his breakfast without further revelations and didn't have any plans for the rest of the day. He could call work. In fact, he probably should. It was more than certain that Hannibal has let the FBI know that Will has almost kicked the bucket last night, so it would be the polite thing to do to let them know he was still alive. He decided it could wait. Will wouldn't put it past Jack to drive straight to Hannibal's house at the very sound of his voice and kidnap him to a new macabre scene somewhere, making all the horrible symptoms that have only now gone away come back twice as strong. The thought of the hallucinations, the dissociation and the constant fear coming back for good now that he had a chance to break free of them was harrowing.

Having made that decision, Will laid in bed for some time, savouring having nowhere to go, nothing to do and feeling more or less like a human being for the first time in weeks. He missed his dogs already. The sounds of their happy stomping and sniffing around, in his house, in his bed, would make this moment perfect.

Or maybe not. Maybe a change of scenery was what he needed.

Will decided to take advantage and explore the house a little. If he got too sick, Hannibal probably had an ornamental fainting couch waiting behind every corner.

Not sure why, but Will half expected the bedroom door to be locked from the outside when he opened it. It would make sense with his sleepwalking, but of course Hannibal wouldn't leave him alone and locked up. There could be a fire, or something.

Will made his way out, dragging the IV behind like a very tall and stubborn dog. He looked to the left, then to the right, not sure what he expected to jump out at him. Some sort of fantastical, horned creature. Exploring someone else's house made him feel on edge, like it was a crime scene. He rarely, if ever, paid visits to others for different reasons.

However, sure enough – a dark bench ottoman waited for him right outside the door, and that could definitely count as a convenient fainting couch. It stood under a large, oval mirror and faced the staircase. The corridor itself was long and narrow. The whole place reminded Will of a waiting room. To the bedroom? The strange discomfort that Will got while thinking about Hannibal and Alana (and possibly himself, as well) together returned. Hannibal has always been somewhat asexual in his mind, perfect and isolated from the real world, surrounded by a bubble of people of similar social status. The switch in his brain from that to a hot-blooded, living person with a rich sex life and desires that could extend past the obvious conventionally attractive female colleague was a shock to his system, definitely equivalent to that of making a revelation about a previously unsuspected witness.

There were a few other small puffs and discreet chairs in muted tones spread here and there along the corridor, with subtle, but no doubt expensive framed pictures hanging above them. A black credenza housed a vase of dried flowers. All that the place was missing to complete the picture was a magazine holder by the bench. Will realised he could smell a vague scent of disinfectant, which might have been enhancing the impression. He wasn't sure whether it was real or hallucinated. It could have been real. Hannibal was putting a needle in his hand there just last night. The needle. With the sound of the wheels squeaking right behind him and the prickling sensation in his skin, Will could feel his mind beginning to slip.

He was in between time and space again, simultaneously in Hannibal Lecter's house and at some unknown waiting room, on an unknown day, an unknown hour. The more he stared at the corridor extending in front of him, the less certain he was of where he was actually supposed to be.

He slumped down on the piece of furniture he's labelled his fainting couch. Of course, it came in handy, but it was actually Hannibal's fainting couch. It bore the marks of his expensive taste. Will dragged his fingers along the fine, soft leather of the bench. No doctor would put a piece like this in their waiting room. With the exception of Hannibal Lecter, of

course, but Will knew what his waiting room looked like. He wasn't there. He didn't lose any time.

'My name is Will Graham,' he held onto the sides of the bench. 'It's…' a look at his phone screen, '10:36 a.m., I'm in Baltimore, Maryland, at Hannibal Lecter's house."

And he wasn't insane. He was sick. His relationship with reality has been temporarily weakened by a treatable disease. He was already getting better. He didn't have to succumb to dissociation every time he briefly felt like something was wrong.

Just as he was catching his breath and preparing to go back to his exploration of the Lecter mansion, his phone vibrated in his hand. Hannibal. Will felt so reassured he could cry. He almost got embarrassed by it, but who other than his therapist was supposed to comfort him when his mind was failing?

"Hi."

"…Hi, Will." Will's never heard him say 'hi' before. There was a smile in Hannibal's voice, the same one he saw when he briefly woke up to Hannibal sleeping and holding his hand. He was relieved to hear from Will. Will wasn't too well-versed in neurology and all the fussing and fumbling made him question the actual severity of his state. Was there a scenario where he didn't wake up? "I didn't wake you, did I?"

"No. I just got up."

"Good. Just don't overdo it. You should be on bedrest."

"Sure, doctor."

"I went to see your dogs. Other than being awfully disappointed to see me instead of you, they all seemed happy and healthy." Will smiled. He was awfully disappointed in the fact that he couldn't see them, too. "I met with Alana. She sends her regards and she's willing to look after your bunch for a while."

Good, kind Alana. Will needed to get well quickly, if only to thank her and return the favour as soon as possible.

"I really can't thank you enough."

"You can," simply replied Hannibal. "Watch out for yourself. You're going to need a lot more time to fully recover. And feel free to treat yourself to anything, there's a few lunch options you'll find in the fridge." That sounded easy enough. "Remember about your grounding exercises if you start to feel confused."

"I know. Thank you."

"There's no need to thank me. I'll be back after 5."

"I know. I'll be waiting."

As Will put his phone back in the pocket of his bathrobe, he realised how out of the ordinary this interaction was for him. Someone checking in on him during the day. Having food left in the fridge. Not even his father, bless his soul, had ever cared for him so much and in such a natural manner.

*

During his exploration Will has discovered another seemingly unused bedroom, a dressing room, a locked door and took a peek inside Hannibal's bedroom, which was open, only to decide that was taking the invasion of privacy too far and retreat. After that he was too embarrassed, as well as exhausted, to continue, and followed his doctor's instruction to treat himself to the first thing he would find in the fridge. That turned out to be some kind of a meat pie, very creamy and stuffed with cranberries. Will even found a loaf of bread to go with it and was quite pleased with himself.

The first floor of Hannibal's house was familiar, at least parts of it, and Will felt more comfortable there. Almost dropping his IV down a flight of stairs and following it all the way down was worth it. Hannibal probably would also be more pleased to see him down there, in the presentable parts of the house, instead of lurking around the bedrooms and walk-in closets. There was still much exploration to be done downstairs, in the familiar spaces of Hannibal's kitchen and dining room. Will didn't get quite as many chances to wander around there as he did in the office.

For example, he's never seen what hid behind the double door right next to the fridge. Probably a pantry of some kind, filled with wine and French cheese. It was open, and sure enough – it was more of a room of its own, with most of its space taken up by a cabinet freezer. There was a wine rack taking up an entire wall, because of course there was, and the freezer itself seemed to be filled mostly with all kinds of meat and cheese. If Hannibal was forced to become vegetarian, or, God forbid, vegan, for health reasons, he would surely choose death.

Will's attention was brought to the braids of garlic and bunches of various herbs hanging on the opposite wall. Did Hannibal dry those himself? It looked like it, and would definitely suit his particular tastes. When did he find the time to pursuit all of his hobbies and interests? Especially now that work in the FBI, often requiring travel, was taking up many of his days.

The pantry held the entrance to the basement, as well. Will lifted the trapdoor, just barely, more out of reflex than any real curiosity. Crawling inside someone's basement to snoop around their old and discarded stuff was definitely a breach of privacy, probably even worse than lurking in the corridor one had technically been let into. Will had a hard time imagining what sort of thing could be hiding in Hannibal's basement. There were those blind spots in Hannibal that Will couldn't seem to fill in at all. It didn't escape him that it was an incomplete, very favourable picture one would present to a person they were interested in pursuing. Getting to know Hannibal Lecter's human side would require a relationship much more personal than the one they currently had.

Or going down to his basement to discover old trinkets, photo albums and letters. Will has been on his feet for long enough to start getting dizzy again, and his legs felt weak, about to

give up on him soon. Walking down a long flight of stairs to a dark basement was one of the worst possible things to do in his situation.

That thought gave him a strange burst of manic energy, adrenaline not unlike what flowed through him in crime scenes, once he's put himself in the shoes of someone he never wanted to be. It wasn't him who lifted the trapdoor all the way up, wasn't Will Graham who slowly put one foot in front of another, lowering himself all the way down to the cool basement floor.

But it definitely was Will Graham who saw a dark corridor lined up with what was undoubtedly bondage gear.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Hannibal helps Will with his personal hygiene. They have an unexpected guest.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will opened his eyes with his head in the sink, to someone spilling lukewarm water all over him.

Water was pouring down his face and in his eyes. The fact that he wasn't actually being drowned didn't settle in right away, so he frantically waved his hands in front of his face and gasped for breath. That's when he actually got water in his nose and his mouth, and he fell to the ground on his hands and knees, coughing to try and get it out of his throat.

"What happened, Will?" a calm, focused voice spoke right above him. "Did I get water in your mouth? I'm sorry."

Will turned his head to look at who was undoubtedly Hannibal, in the scenery of the guest room bathroom. The tiles he fell on were the same shade of dark grey as the walls in his room. Hannibal stood next to the sink, wearing a blue shirt with its sleeves rolled up, his usual blazer and vest gone. He looked somewhat confused, as one would expect to be if they just witnessed a grown man almost drowning himself in the sink and falling face-first on their bathroom floor. Will's been spending a lot of time on Hannibal's bathroom floors recently.

He grabbed a piece of toilet paper and blew his nose to get the water out. His throat was burning.

"I lost time," he gasped.

"Right now?"

"Right now. The last thing I remember…" are the chains and handcuffs on the walls of your basement, "Is sitting in your kitchen. You were gone." That should be a good alibi in case during the hours he's lost Hannibal had found him snooping around somewhere he shouldn't have been.

Now that he recalled his fateful discovery in Hannibal Lecter's basement, it was kind of funny. A dirty little secret is something he should've expected when he went looking for it. It was kind of funny, too, that that was doctor Lecter's secret second life – the blank spot Will couldn't see with all his empathy and his wit. To think that the darkness lurking in the corners

of his house would be so benign. Still, this kind of interest could shatter the beautifully cultivated image of himself Hannibal presented to the outside world.

Which is why that first moment of realisation was shocking. So shocking, in fact, that it made Will's brain shut down.

"All of your symptoms won't disappear right away." Hannibal wiped his hands on a towel and extended a palm to him. He had the strong yet delicate and soft hands of a former surgeon. "The treatment takes time. That's why you shouldn't go back to work, or stay alone at your house in the middle of the woods."

Will stood up with Hannibal's help. His legs were as weak as they were that morning, the last morning he could remember, which at least meant he hasn't lost entire days. Most likely.

"What time is it?" Will wiped the water off his face. "And what the hell are we doing together in the bathroom?"

"It is…" Hannibal made a point of looking at his wristwatch. "Exactly 6:37 p.m., we are at my house in Baltimore, and I was in the middle of washing your hair, which you have asked me for help with."

Will somehow doubted that. What seemed more likely was that he struggled pitifully in the shower and only agreed for Hannibal to help once he's explicitly made an offer. Or something even worse happened, such as the scene Will made in the hospital, which had landed them both in their current predicament.

"Okay. Alright." Will sat down on the little wooden stool he was apparently previously occupying. "Were we almost done?"

"I'm afraid we were just getting started, but we can stop if you don't feel up to it."

Will gazed up at Hannibal, wondering if he looked as pathetic to him as he felt. Nothing would show on his doctor's face, it never did, except an expectant smile. It would be normal to insist on Will showering. Over twenty-four hours of stale sweat on him couldn't have been pleasant to be around, especially not with Hannibal's extremely sensitive sense of smell. But why the hair? Why wash his hair?

Will's mind returned to the thought that plagued him that morning, before the slightly disturbing discovery which successfully shut down his mind. That's not how friends were with each other, he was fairly certain, even if he hasn't exactly had the pleasure of learning from experience. Maybe among women this type of behaviour could be fully platonic. Not with men, not really.

He turned around on the stool and lowered his head into the sink, allowing Hannibal to resume washing his hair.

"Are you attracted to me?" He asked as Hannibal's swift fingers found their way into his curls, rubbing his scalp.

Hannibal remained unbothered, and proceeded to squeeze out shampoo on Will's head. Its smell was subtle, barely there, a testament to his keen nose.

"I guess it goes to show you weren't really there with me moments ago," Hannibal's hands were gentle on his head, as if petting a skittish cat, just like they were with everything. "You just asked me the same question not even ten minutes ago."

"And the answer?"

"Remains the same."

"Which is?"

"Which is, are you sure you don't want to wait with this discussion for a few days, until your medicine can start to work properly? Just so we can make sure you don't wake up tomorrow and ask me for the third time."

With all his tenderness, Hannibal was never one to coddle Will, but now he had a hard time telling whether he was being genuinely concerned or just sarcastic. Will wasn't sure what to say. Sure, it can wait, I never know whether I'm awake or not either, but it's been getting better?

"That's not a no," is what he settled on, because it kept the discussion on a different track than his mental and physical well-being. He also felt it appropriate to tease Hannibal back.

"Do you believe kindness to be camouflage?," Came the reply, because Hannibal was not one to be teased without repercussion.

He didn't see Hannibal as someone harbouring hidden intentions and using grand gestures as means to an end, no. There was something else there. When he extended his mind towards the other man, he hit a certain blind spot, as always, but some facts of his soul were too difficult to hide away with the secrets of his past and basement-based activities. Will was pretty sure that Hannibal simply couldn't help himself sometimes.

"Not camouflage. A symptom."

Hannibal's fingers pressed into Will's aching temples, rubbing circles into his skin. It always came to Will as a surprise how casual some people were about physical contact. With Hannibal it was as natural as breathing, as a light conversation. It was never a big deal, never meant anything past sympathy, and that made Will comfortable. Even now, in this extremely vulnerable and compromised position, he didn't find himself flinching away, which would normally be the case.

"Our feelings towards others are often seen as a malady of the mind."

"I should know what that looks like," Will scoffed. Hannibal's hand found itself on its neck, gently tilting his chin back towards the sink. "Did you wake up one day with me in your bedroom, after you've brought me there in your sleep?"

"That would make two of us."

“Are you sleepwalking, doctor Lecter?”

“I don’t know. I think I might be dreaming.”

Warm water again spilled on Will’s forehead and trickled down his face, his temples, his hair, drowning the world away.

*

Will spent the rest of the day in a haze, pondering over the meaning of Hannibal’s words, as he’s often found himself doing after their conversations. However, usually the pondering had more to do with violent crimes and not so much his own feelings, romantic or otherwise.

He had to come to terms with the fact that he’d been right, and Hannibal saw him as more than a patient; more, or rather something else, than a friend. The idea made him uncomfortable, but he was aware that the cause of the unease was the inevitable change rather Hannibal’s feelings themselves. Those were, in fact, quite flattering. Will would very seldom find himself the object of anyone’s affections, least of all attractive, wealthy men; past college, he simply didn’t interact with people enough for anything that could end in a romantic pursuit, and when it did, more often than not it was Will doing the pursuing, with varying results. Even when people were drawn to his dishevelled looks, his odd behaviour, speaking patterns and general nervousness never failed to scare them away. It would be nice to have a chance for something with Hannibal, to become closer, intimate.

Change, however, was something Will has never been able to handle well. He had his little routines, with room for blood, gore and the most deranged people on Earth, not so much for lovers. What would even happen between them now? Would they have to start dating in secret, as not to cast doubt on Hannibal Lecter’s professional ethics? Or rather stop seeing each as doctor and patient? Would anything change at all? Other than the atmosphere of their meetings, which would become increasingly awkward until it imploded in some kind of grand gesture.

Hannibal didn’t say much after rinsing Will’s hair and giving him a towel to dry himself off. He was holding himself back, biting his tongue, Will was able to tell that much. Hannibal changed his IV as well, spending a lot of time carefully watching Will’s palm from every angle to make sure there was no signs of infection, as if a needle in the hand was the worst thing that’s ever hurt him. He was given permission to roam freely around the house wherever he pleased, and then Hannibal locked himself up in his studio with his piles of books, journals and notebooks.

Will could get used to that – Hannibal’s hands on him, his presence always somewhere nearby, sharing space. It’s been so long, but he could learn to appreciate it again with someone. It’d just take time, like everything else.

His thoughts kept wandering back to his discovery in Hannibal’s basement. After a few hours, most of which he’d spent dissociating, he wasn’t even certain whether what he saw was really BDSM gear or something else entirely that he completely misinterpreted through his encephalitic brain fog. He would have to make sure to take advantage of Hannibal’s invitation and explore the place properly. Maybe Hannibal wanted him to find it – wouldn’t

he have locked the door otherwise? What if it was a part of some erotic game that Will missed? Wouldn't be the first time he was oblivious to someone else's blatant flirting. That type of thing would suit Hannibal Lecter. Now that he thought about it, it would suit him as well – the hunt, the investigative aspect of it.

Another thing he wasn't sure of what role was he meant to play in that game. Could the strange idea of washing his hair have something to do with it? Was it meant to be some sort of an act of servitude? The thought made him squirm inside. Hannibal was right. He wasn't in the right state, physically or mentally, to grapple with the enigma of his psychiatrist turned friend's sex life.

He was in his bed, mindlessly flipping through one of the art books Hannibal's left on the shelves for his guests, in a fruitless attempt to distract himself from the troubling yet enticing thoughts and feelings, which would have to wait for him to get better. The hair washing scene had exhausted him to the point of falling asleep as soon as he was out of the bathroom, so now, in the evening, he didn't feel like sleeping at all. He was tempted to go downstairs and knock on Hannibal's door, if only to bother him a little, ask about dinner, just look at his face for a while, try and guess what he was thinking. It didn't matter how complicated their relationship would get. Hannibal had a naturally soothing effect on people.

What ended up distracting Will from his thoughts, however, was the sound of something hitting the window. The first person who came to his mind, when he wondered who possibly could be throwing rocks at Hannibal's house, was Freddie Lounds, probably because he associated her with all things rude and troublesome.

When he looked down to the garden, however, he saw none other than Abigail Hobbs in the flesh.

"What the hell are *you* doing here?", were the first words to come out of her mouth when he opened the window. She was wearing her coat, wrapped in one of her many scarfs, smiling, and undeniably real.

"I should be the one asking you that," Will replied as quietly as he could, trying not to alert the neighbours. "Aren't you supposed to be in Port Haven?"

"Are you wearing a bathrobe?"

He was. Will figured his condition gave him a free pass not to get dressed that day.

"Are we going to keep yelling to each other or will you come in?"

"I was going to, but I think I got the wrong house."

Will could already tell where this was going and clutched the window pane with a deep sigh.

"Does Hannibal know you're here?"

"He knows of the possibility."

Which meant Abigail has been regularly fleeing the psychiatric facility to hang out with Hannibal and neither of them thought it appropriate to let him know. Great.

“Wait here. I’ll go tell him.”

“Not allowed to let strangers in, huh?”

Will shook his head at her with a smile and shut the window, retreating back into the house.

He was happy to see Abigail, always was, even if her presence only added to the chaos inside his head. He had no idea how she’s managed to escape from Port Haven, but that was not important. She was there, and maybe would even join them for dinner. It didn’t escape him that she could serve as the much needed third party between him and Hannibal, now that they were at an emotionally tense moment. He had no doubt that there would be teasing about Will spending his evening at Hannibal’s house, wearing a bathrobe and clearly at home there, but that was alright. Joking about it could be a good starting point for a later discussion.

“Hannibal,” he knocked on the door of the studio. That was another room in the house he’s never been inside before. He imagined it would be a miniature version of Lecter’s expansive office in the city. “Abigail came here.”

Hannibal opened the door and welcomed Will with an utterly baffled expression.

“She said you would expect her.”

“That’s not what surprised me,” Hannibal’s face returned to his usual calm, gentle smile. “Let’s go give her a welcome.” He didn’t comment further and hurried to the front door.

“What’s so surprising, then?”

“Oh,” Hannibal stopped mid-step on his way through the hallway. “Just that you’ve never called me by my first name before.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone reading, leaving kudos and comments! I'm doing my best to update this story every week.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

> This is the shortest chapter so far, since it's the result of splitting a longer one in half, but I hope it's still satisfactory.
>
> I'm actually not sure whether I'm halfway through this fic. I don't have a detailed plan and I'm mostly winging it, so the number of chapters might still go up. Enjoy more fluff for now!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Abigail's eyes kept darting from Will, to Hannibal, then back to Will, anywhere but the plate of Greek delicacies Hannibal had prepared for them. She kept smirking, too, and looked overall incredibly amused and pleased with herself. Will was glad. It was the most content he's seen her since the moment their paths crossed. He wondered if Alana put her on any medication. It was likely, but of course he wouldn't know anything about it unless Abigail saw it fit to tell him. Alana, ever the professional, would never.

Finally, when Hannibal was done explaining to both of them how absolutely crucial it is for Abigail's therapy that she escape it every once in a while to eat proper food, she took a deep breath and addressed the elephant in the room.

"So," she gave both of them a knowing look with a wide smile, "Should I be congratulating the two of you or has this been going on for a while?"

"It's been going on since last night," Hannibal replied without missing a beat and with a similarly eerie smile.

"And there's not much to congratulate," Will quickly cut in. "I have encephalitis."

Abigail frowned, visibly trying not to burst out laughing.

"Encephalitis made you sleep with doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal, on the other hand, couldn't help himself and began to chuckle into his glass of wine.

"No, Abigail, I didn't sleep with doctor Lecter. Doctor Lecter has been taking care of me," Will said, trying to summon one of the expressions that normal people tend to make when engaging in light-hearted banter.

"I'm sure he has."

“I can assure you that my relationship with Will has been nothing but friendly. I would never take advantage of him in such a situation.”

“Hannibal-“

“Oh, so it’s not doctor Lecter anymore either, huh?”

“I’m very sorry to break it to you, Abigail, but tragically no one slept with anyone,” deadpanned Will.

Hannibal kept chuckling, which with his mild manners looked more nodding his head while blowing out air through his nose. Abigail, on the other hand, began to laugh out loud, covering her full mouth with her hand. Will knew from the moment he saw her in the garden that this would end in a lot of bad jokes at his and Hannibal’s expense, but Abigail’s laugh, this wonderful sound he never thought he’d even get to hear, was contagious. She slapped him on the shoulder, like they’ve been friends for years and this meeting over dinner was just something they did, and he burst out laughing too.

Will opened his mouth to scold Hannibal for enabling this merciless teasing, but when he looked up at him, Hannibal’s eyes were filled with tears.

See?, they said to Will. *See? We could have a life still. We’ve both been orphaned, we’ve been so alone. But we could still have a family. We could live here and a raise child here, this beautiful woman-child and all your dog-children.*

*

Abigail didn’t stay the night to avoid trouble at Port Haven; even with Hannibal at her side, the patience of their staff wasn’t infinite. The doctor drove her back, since it was a long journey by public transport.

By the time he got back home, Will was fading. He did his best to stay on the surface during Abigail’s visit, even as strength was leaving him, but now he was floating on his armchair in the vast open ocean of the living room like a child clinging to a pool float.

The walls were covered in seaweed; or more seaweed than usual, at least – they always seemed a bit too green for Will’s liking. It was floating too, moving in sync with Will’s breath. Little black fish and big black piranhas swam back and forth under the coffee table and between his feet.

“You’ll have to excuse me for the unexpected visit of our guest,” Hannibal floated in. Will could swear his feet didn’t touch the ground. “That must’ve been tiring for you. But it was nice to see our Abigail in such high spirits, don’t you agree?”

“Does she come here often?” It was hard for Will to speak when he couldn’t hear himself, with ears full of water. It was strange how Hannibal’s voice still seemed to reach him perfectly, echoing off the walls of the underwater cave they’ve found themselves in.

“She’s paid a visit before. I’ve even brought her here myself. We shared a meal with doctor Bloom.”

“Trying to forget?”

“More than forgetting the old, I’d like to believe she’s trying to find something new.” Hannibal brushed away the seaweed separating him from Will’s armchair and placed his palm on his forehead for what must’ve been the hundredth time in the past twenty four hours. “Do you want to go upstairs now?”

Will just nodded, because it was easier than trying to talk with ears and mouth full of seawater, and tried to get up, but his feet got caught up in the slime at the bottom and he fell back in the armchair.

Hannibal, who possessed the mysterious ability to move freely underwater, slid one arm under his knees, the other under his back, and simply picked him up. Will initially stiffened up, then went limp in his arms, like a dead fish.

“I’m sorry, Will,” Hannibal whispered, but his voice seemed to be coming from all corners of the hallway at once. “It really was too much for you.”

Hannibal adjusted his hold on Will before braving the staircase. Good. If he was let go of, Will would surely drift away somewhere far away and all of FBI would be unable to ever find him. His corpse would end up washing ashore months later, with all the other dead fish, maybe even in another country. Hannibal, on the hand, knew just what to do with his useless body to keep it safe. Whatever that would be. Tie it down. Chain it to the radiator.

“What do you want to do with me?”

“Right now I’m going to put you back in bed, where you should’ve been staying in the first place.” Hannibal expertly avoided accidentally smashing Will’s head against the wall when they turned a corner, proving once again of being the most capable of caretakers.

“No, I mean… Not now. In general.”

Hannibal stopped at the top of the staircase, either to drive the point home or catch his breath, Will wasn’t sure. Hannibal didn’t seem out of breath. He didn’t look like he was just carrying an adult man up a flight of stairs at all. He looked happy. Smiling. Always smiling.

“I’m just going to keep you here with me.”

“What about… the stuff in the basement?”

“What about it?” Hannibal raised one eyebrow and continued his march onward, to the dark grey-blue depths of the guest bedroom. He managed to open the door with a surprisingly graceful manoeuvre of his foot and elbow.

“Oh, forget it.” Will was gently dropped down on the mattress without as much as a sigh from Hannibal, and his head placed on the pillow. “You probably think I’m too sick to even think about sex.”

Will couldn’t see him clearly in the dimly lit room, but Hannibal looked like he was trying hard not to laugh again. He rolled the IV pole over to the side of the bed and pulled out a small box from the nightstand drawer.

“Will, I’m afraid I don’t have the slightest idea of what you’re trying to imply here.”

“I’m not implying anything. Just asking.”

“And I’ve told you,” Hannibal looked intently at the back of his hand, feeling up the skin around the needle, checking for the tiniest sign of an infection. “That right now all I want to do to you is make sure you’re here with me.”

Will rolled his eyes.

“Where else would I go?”

Hannibal cradled Will’s palm in both of his, caressing it with his thumbs, then brought it up to his lips and pressed a kiss on his knuckles.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for the kudos and kind words.

Next chapter the rating goes up and there will be more dark themes, so heed the warnings!

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

> This is where it gets dark and NSFW. Heed the warnings and enjoy if you're into weird shit.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

„Oh, Will, my poor, sweet Will. Don’t you understand that this is for your own good? If you’d just relax everything would be done and over with by now.”

Will was in the familiar blueish-grey bed of Hannibal Lecter’s guest bedroom, with its sheets the colour a stormy sea, but aside from that everything was wrong. His hands were handcuffed to the bed, with what he knew came from the God forsaken basement. The IV that’s kept him company non-stop since Hannibal had hooked him up to it was nowhere to be seen.

The voice which spoke to him was distant and reverberated as if they were both underwater, and Will couldn’t tell who it belonged to, other than that it was a man. His face was hidden in the shadows at the feet of the bed. He talked like Hannibal, and the silhouette in the dark looked like his, but Will wasn’t sure if it was him at all. He hoped it wasn’t. It wouldn’t make sense; Hannibal has never been anything but gentle with him. He handed Will his ancient European thermometer and held his arm to keep it in place.

He would never handcuff Will to the bed and force his legs apart in order to insert said thermometer into his anus, which appeared to be currently happening. How bizarre that this would happen to him in what he thought was absolute safety of Hannibal’s home.

“You don’t have to do this,” he decided to appeal to the man’s reason. “Doctor Lecter is taking care of me.”

“Doctor Lecter isn’t here,” the man stated matter-of-factly. “You can trust me in his stead.”

The attacker once again tried to grab Will’s legs, but he kicked him off.

“This is sexual assault.”

“This is an old method of taking one’s temperature which has worked for centuries.” The man spoke with an accent which resembled Hannibal’s, though not exactly. “If only you would stop kicking and writhing, it would be nice and easy.”

Will thought that if this was Hannibal, he’d believe those words and spread his legs. The realisation frightened him.

But if this wasn't Hannibal – and it couldn't be – who was with him in the room?

The only explanation that came to his mind was that he wasn't at Hannibal's house at all in the first place; and sure enough, the moment he thought of it, the scenery changed to a hospital room. Surely, this wasn't really happening. It was a repressed memory. A traumatic memory of what happened that night at the ER, coming back to him. That's what happened. He didn't have a panic attack because of light overstimulation. He'd been abused.

That didn't mean he could calm down and just let it happen.

"You're not doctor Lecter," he said out loud, to reassure himself more than anything. The man grabbed his ankles again and Will yet again attempted to break free, but his body was weak with illness.

"You're delirious, Will. You don't know what you're seeing."

"Maybe," Will groaned with exertion as the man finally pushed his knees down on the mattress. "But I know Hannibal."

"I'm only doing what's right for you."

The man grabbed Will's thigh, digging sharp fingernails deep into his skin. His buttocks were spread open as far his position on the bed would allow it. He hissed as he felt the soft skin around his anus be scratched and pulled at with the man's fingers, allowing the tip of his thumb to force its way inside.

"You're doing this to me because you like it," Will groaned as the glass of the thermometer, covered in something cold and slick, was pressed against him.

The man pushed it inside, inch by excruciating inch, savouring Will's squirming and hissing as burning pain shot up through his entire body. Will bit his lip and threw his head back in an attempt to choke back a scream.

The ceiling was the dark blue-grey shade of Hannibal Lecter's guest bedroom. Wrong. Will bit through his lip and swallowed blood.

"See?" When he opened his eyes, he saw the face Garrett Jacob Hobbs between his legs. "That didn't hurt at all."

*

When Will went downstairs to see Hannibal's basement again the next morning, just to make sure he really saw it, the trapdoor in the pantry was locked.

*

The rest of the week passed by without incidents. Will's condition only continued to get better. He was still plagued by nightmares, but in the mornings he woke up to breakfast and a note from Hannibal waiting by his bedside. One night, when he was jolted awake in the middle of the night, Hannibal went down to the kitchen to sit with him and made tea. They

talked for an hour before Will was escorted back to bed with a sleeping pill just in case and a squeeze of the hand.

He wasn't certain whether the disturbing recurring themes of his nightmares actually meant anything or if they were a product of the stress of dealing with his illness and Hannibal's feelings at the same time. They didn't speak about their visit to the ER anymore; Hannibal probably didn't want to embarrass him by bringing back the memory, and Will didn't push. Even if something terrible did happen to Will there, Hannibal wouldn't know about it. The difference between dreams and memories tended to blur for Will a lot, encephalitis or not. Maybe it was better to keep it that way.

He was given the time and space to cope with the inevitable development of their relationship, and it seemed more and more natural with every day. He could feel himself preparing for the upcoming end of this temporary arrangement, and the conversation it would have to bring, and with every day, the thought of it came a bit easier to him. Both parties involved being well versed in psychology probably helped make it less difficult.

His work for the FBI seemed like a fever dream. Maybe that would make the return easier. He had no doubt that recovering from a brain condition would make him able to cope better with getting inside the twisted minds the nation had to offer. But surely, this little retreat away from responsibilities couldn't hurt, either. Maybe that's what he needed in the first place, a break. Hannibal has assured him that his professional situation had been handled. Beverly called him once, to make sure he was okay, without mentioning anything about work. Clearly, his co-workers have been instructed on the subject by his doting psychiatrist. Slash friend. Slash lover. Only time would tell.

Sometimes life had a way of everything coming together like that. As doomed as Will tended to feel a lot of the times, now, in the reassuring greys and blues of the guestroom – his room – the skies seemed a little clearer. His work, the good work he was doing to save people, might not ruin him this time around. He could have a partner. Will didn't think he's ever used the word before in his life, but it was better than calling Hannibal Lecter his *boyfriend*. Modern terms in general didn't fit the doctor. He was from a different century, a different continent altogether. One ought to address him in Latin and Ancient Greek, not twenty first century American English.

Will himself felt as if he'd slipped away from reality since the faithful night when his brain had almost boiled itself. There was something in the food and the water at Hannibal's house. Being a part of his world made you special.

Spending every day with Hannibal, not just an hour a week and occasionally at work, must have been making Will something else entirely.

And they did spend time together every day. Hannibal examined him after work - took his temperature, performed a full interview, kept checking his palm for infection, and when it was bruised, switched the needle over to the left one. Will probably had more physical contact with Hannibal during one week than with anyone else in his entire life. He didn't recall ever talking to anyone with such frequency, either. His brain was being stimulated constantly and exquisitely.

He didn't bother thinking about other kinds of stimulation. Judging by his reactions to Hannibal's hands on him, however, it shouldn't be much of an issue.

His sleep schedule was pretty much the only thing which didn't come back to normal; at least the sleepwalking didn't appear to be an issue anymore. He's suffered from periods of insomnia and hypersomnia interchangeably for most of his life, at least the part of it he's dedicated to catching murderers. It came with the territory. Hannibal, who seemed to fall asleep and wake up on command, the moment it was appropriate to do so, would just have to get used to it. Not that he seemed to mind. And it wasn't like they would be moving in together, as tempting as Hannibal could make the thought at times, promising home and family without words. Will couldn't imagine staying there permanently, couldn't picture moving his dogs to the city, and Hannibal would no doubt wither away in the emptiness of Wolf Trap, taken away from his high society.

On Thursday, exactly seven days since Will's brain catching on fire had brought them together into these strange circumstances, Hannibal decided that his patient was doing well enough to leave him alone for the night and attend an academic gathering. He promised to pick up his phone at all times, abstain from any alcoholic beverages, and be back before ten, which made Will feel only a little like a child or a nagging wife. The feeling went away soon enough, when he walked his caretaker over to the door and felt like kissing him, realising that it was not the first time.

He settled down in front of the fireplace in the living room, with this thought in mind and a movie on Hannibal's tablet. He wasn't given much time to ponder on Hannibal Lecter's smiling, adoring, kissable face, however, before the doorbell rang, announcing the arrival of one Abigail Hobbs. Who, in her own words, missed both him and Hannibal, but just Will would do as well.

Will let her in with all the snow and howling wind she brought along. Pale skin, straight dark hair. Piercing eyes. She didn't look like the child of Garrett Jacob Hobbs. She should be someone else's daughter.

"I'm not as trained in culinary arts as Hannibal, but lucky for you, he always has leftovers." Will took her coat and led her inside, into the bright warmth of the kitchen. He was starting to think of the many rooms of the Lecter house as his. It'd be strange for them to be completely someone else's again.

"I've had dinner. A snack will do."

"Coming to Hannibal's house with a full stomach? A rookie mistake."

"I do have to eat the hospital food sometimes, if only to keep appearances. It's better than you'd think."

She was nervous. Will couldn't decide whether her mood was the cause for the unexpected visit, or the other way around – if Hannibal's absence made her uncomfortable. Being alone with Will tended to have that effect on people, as much as it pained him to come from Abigail.

“Yeah, it’s a place where people are supposed to get better.” Sure enough, Will found a glass container full of gnocchi (Hannibal would probably sooner die than use Tupperware). “He didn’t talk to you about his… thing at Johns Hopkins?”

Abigail shook her head.

“We don’t meet regularly. He’s not *actually* my doctor.”

“I know. Doctor Bloom is.” He wondered if her and Hannibal would meet that night. “But I feel like you’ve actually spent much more time with doctor Lecter.”

“Hannibal.”

“Yes. Him.”

“So,” Abigail shook like a dog drying itself from the rain and jumped up to sit on the counter. She was trying to act natural. Couldn’t exactly run out the door now. Will didn’t know what to do to make her feel better. “Are you two actually together? I genuinely can’t tell, with the way you react to it.”

“We’re not a couple. *Hannibal* really is just taking care of me while I’m sick.” Will wanted to come up with a joke. It was a topic which cheered her up. He couldn’t think of anything but the truth.

“But he likes you. A lot.”

“I know.”

Their eyes meet over the stove.

“I think it would be nice,” said Abigail with a smile that seemed genuine. “To have you two together.”

“I think so too,” said Will, keeping eye contact, burning the image of Abigail’s smiling face into his brain. Maybe it was because of the unfortunate circumstances of their meeting, but she was ephemeral to him; he always felt like he was seeing her for the last time.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the kudos and comments! It really makes me feel better.

Sorry if the updates aren't as frequent now - my shifts at work have been made longer now. I work at a train station and we're all working hard to make sure it runs smoothly while we welcome refugees from Ukraine!

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> And looks like this thing got longer again. I don't want to post chapters that are too long, so this one got split in two again. There's also more weird kinky stuff again! Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The trapdoor to the basement was open again, and it taunted Will with warm yellow light around its edges, coming from inside and inviting him to come down and explore again.

Someone was there; or at least someone had paid a visit and forgot to turn off the light. Will could only think of one such person, unless Hannibal had brought someone over, which he hasn't done so far in the short time they've spent sharing a house. Abigail didn't count. Will couldn't bear the thought of her in Hannibal's secret dungeon. It was just too out of character, for both of them. An affair between a middle-aged psychiatrist and his young protégé, how banal. How grotesque all the same.

Will tried to push open the trapdoor just a little, to take a look inside and retreat, but it made a horrific screech, no doubt alerting whoever was lurking inside of his presence. If he were to get caught, he could just pretend he had no idea of the treasure hidden down there. As far as he knew, Hannibal wasn't aware Will had made the discovery.

There was no sound coming from the bottom of the stairs. Will slowly lowered himself to the basement, not trying to hide his presence anymore, but not announcing it, either.

The walls on both sides of the narrow corridor were lined with small vintage lanterns, emitting the warm and inviting light, resembling that of candles or a fireplace. The place where Hannibal had sex, it seemed, was kept as warm, cosy and homely as the rest of his house and his office. Ever the perfect host. God forbid anyone felt uninvited while they were being chained to a wall.

The light from behind the corner, however, twinkled and made the shadows on the wall come to life. It was the light of a crackling fire burning bright. As Will took a step towards it, the lightbulbs behind his back flickered and died. He knew the same would happen to the rest as he moved forward, leaving him with the fire ahead as the only source of light and pushing him into the arms of whoever waited for him there. Nevertheless, he took another step, and kept walking, until he found himself in complete darkness except for the bright room behind the corner.

"Hello, Will."

Will couldn't see who the voice belonged to. The timbre and accent were familiar, yet distant at the same time; like the voice of someone he met long ago and hasn't seen in a long time.

“Doctor Lecter,” he took a guess.

“Please. I liked it quite a bit when you called me by my first name.”

“Hannibal?”

“It’s me, Will.”

The fact that these words needed to be said bothered Will. He turned around, but it seemed like there was nowhere to go. The house he left behind was submerged in complete darkness. He stepped forward.

No one was waiting for him.

“Guess who,” said the voice as large, strong hands covered his eyes from behind. Will grabbed them with his own, not trying to pull them away just yet, but not wanting to just stand there at the mercy of who could be not his friend, but a complete stranger.

“You said it was you.”

“It is.”

“But are you Hannibal Lecter, or not?”

“It’s me.” One of the hands slipped down Will’s neck, leaving his eyes covered with the other one. “It’s me, Will. You’re safe.”

“What are you going to do to me?”

“Whatever you want.”

Unsurprisingly, Hannibal’s hand found its way underneath Will’s shirt and caressed his chest. Will let it happen. Hannibal drew little circles on his skin with his fingertip.

“I want you to show me what you like to do down here.”

“At your service,” the reply came with a kiss on his neck.

Will still couldn’t see where he was going, but he was led to a bed and gently pushed down to sit. The tenderness with which he was being handled pointed towards the stranger’s identity being Hannibal Lecter after all. No one else’s ever treated him that way, least of all when they were about to have sex with him. Most of his partners expected him to take the lead, mistaking his awkwardness for aloofness.

The hand was removed from his eyes, but much like with the voice, Will found himself unable to fully recognise the face in front of him. It was too blurry, and shadows danced across it in a way that made it seem everchanging.

He was then passed a smile – a dancing smile of moving shadows – before being blindfolded and made to lay down with hands pushing down on his shoulders and cradling the small of

his back.

“You’re nice. I thought it’d be rough.”

“I can be rough.”

“I told you to do what you like.”

“I like you.” Will didn’t know if that was meant as a joke. He didn’t care. He had more urgent matters on his hands. Hannibal caressing his face. Hannibal unbuttoning his shirt. Hannibal kissing him on the lips. If that was really Hannibal. “I’m going to show you something delightful.”

He took his time undoing all the buttons on Will’s shirt, one by one, with both hands, with urgent determination. Will’s nervous, shaky inhale was met by a soft kiss on his neck. Then, both of Hannibal’s hands travelling up his sides, counting his ribs with curious fingers. And then a touch of a cold blade.

“Is that a knife?”

“A scalpel, dear.”

Hannibal warmed up the blade, rubbing both its sides on Will’s hot skin, leaving goosebumps in its trail and drawing increasingly shaky, deep gasps from him. It was only when he felt that it was ready, sufficiently hot and sufficiently human to the touch, that he cut into Will’s sternum, starting at the base of his neck and finishing right above his navel. A shallow wound, no deeper than a papercut, just enough to sting and for little pearls of blood to bubble up to the surface. Hannibal firmly took hold of Will, grabbing both of his sides with eager hands, and lowered his mouth into the wound, licking, sucking, devouring. It tingled, but felt a bit itchy at the same time, and sent waves of arousal into Will’s body.

“You like drinking blood,” he gasped out as Hannibal’s tongue chased a droplet of blood down his side.

“Among other things.”

“And who was here before me?”

“You don’t know them.”

Sharp teeth tore into his split skin, trying to pull it apart and get inside. The pain was sharp, then throbbing, flooding his body with unexpected pleasure.

“Did you drink their blood too?”

“Oh, no. You’re special to me, Will.”

*

„Will.”

The voice from far away, which sounded like Hannibal, but didn't really belong to him, was in Will's dreams again, and its owner was tugging at his shoulder.

"Will, dear, you need to wake up."

The man who wasn't Hannibal never hesitated to call him pet names, but for some reason this time it sounded wrong and that's what brought Will back from the dark comfort of his slumber and back to reality.

Hannibal Lecter – this time there was no doubt it was him – was standing next to Will's bed, looking visibly concerned. It was a regular Friday. Unless Will slept in until well into the afternoon, Hannibal wasn't supposed to even be there. The sun was still high up in the sky. The glass cloche protecting his breakfast wasn't in its usual place, neither was the note, which he's been finding by his side every day without fail. Something wasn't right.

"What happened?"

"Did Abigail come here yesterday?"

Will rubbed his forehead, trying to get his hair out of his eyes. Abigail was there yesterday. Or was it really yesterday?

He could recall her standing at the door not long after Hannibal left to attend a debate at Johns Hopkins. If today was Friday, that would be yesterday. Will had dinner with her. Then they retired to the living room. They sat by the fireplace.

Then what?

"I…" Will caught himself looking up towards Hannibal, looking for help. He knew he'd find it there. "I lost time again."

"That's not the answer to my question." And those weren't the words Will expected to hear after he'd disclosed his distress. The stern and determined look in Hannibal's eyes wasn't the one of care and tenderness he got so used to seeing.

"She was there," Will scanned the room for his glasses when eye contact suddenly became unbearable. He hasn't worn them for the past week; wasn't even sure what happened to them with so many other problems on his mind, as his relationship with Hannibal got more and more comfortable. He must've had them during his ill-fated appointment, but what became of them when Hannibal got a hold of his belongings? "I think. I think it was yesterday."

"Will. I really need you to focus right now." Will drew in a shaky breath as he met Hannibal's eyes. He looked like he was about to hit him. "Was Abigail here last night and did you see her leave?"

What happened to his glasses? Hannibal's eyes drilled into his and he felt like he really needed them right now. Why did everything turn so wrong all of a sudden?

What happened to Abigail Hobbs?

Will rubbed his eyes. They hurt. He pressed his fingertips into his eyelids, trying to force out as much light as possible. In an instant, everything became too much to handle and the only person who could help him was currently the source of his distress.

“What happened?” Nevertheless, he forced himself to look up. “Is Abigail missing?”

Hannibal clenched his jaw.

“I believe most of her still is,” he replied, walking away from the bed and facing the window.

“What? What do you mean?” Will frowned, as if he didn’t know exactly and with terrible precision exactly what Hannibal meant. He just couldn’t acknowledge it yet. He had to feel the cold, sharp realisation sink into every cell of his body first.

“Did you see Abigail Hobbs leave?”

Which part did they find? Hannibal said ‘most’. That wasn’t the choice of words he’d use to describe a headless body, and that finding would be too macabre for him to use sarcasm. Could be a limb, maybe not even a whole one. A finger, an ear or an eye. Body parts without which one could go on living.

Body parts that do not get removed unless one has a very particular message to send. Body parts that get lost on accident. Body parts you can put in your mouth, or keep as a souvenir.

“No. No, I didn’t.” Will stared at his own fingers, pondering over the many uses they could serve to someone interested. Not many killers would be, unless they had a personal vendetta or an obsessive interest in him. Will was too big and too strong to be easily overwhelmed and transported, and his fingers weren’t too pretty – callous, hard and hairy. Not like the slender, tiny and soft fingers of a young woman. “What did they find?”

Hannibal clutched the windowsill with the strength Will would never want turned against him.

“A finger, Will. Her pinkie finger. With a bite mark on it.”

*

The interrogation was a nightmare which revealed nothing but the fact that he was definitely the last person to see Abigail Hobbs alive, with a convenient memory gap, too. Not only did he not manage to clear himself of suspicion, he dragged Hannibal down with him, as the one corroborating his encephalitis diagnosis. Judging by the look on the officers’ faces whenever it was mentioned, they worked on the assumption that everything to come out of Will’s mouth was a lie, even if confirmed by medical documentation. Easy to falsify, especially with a doctor at hand.

Will considered finding the ER staff who treated him and the doctor who interpreted his MRI results, but thought better of it. What good would it do for him, except confirm that he didn’t know what he was doing half the time? It could only prove useful if he was going to plead insanity, and that was, hopefully, a long way ahead.

Besides, he had a feeling that if he were to go back to that place, he might come back knowing more than he'd like to. If there was any truth in the content of his nightmares and they were, in fact, repressed memories, Will would prefer to keep them that way. He didn't need more traumatic events in his life for a while now.

He wasn't arrested, not yet. Abigail was officially missing and the search for her continued. Will figured someone who had the ability to influence the investigation didn't believe him to be guilty. Or just knew he wouldn't run away. He was sick, in despair and had nowhere to go. For now, the investigation was focused on getting a warrant to search his house, for some reason. (The reason was looking bits and pieces of Abigail Hobbs stuffed under the mattress and shoved in the fireplace.)

They took a mould of his teeth and were now running bitemark analysis on the finger, but Will knew the mark wouldn't be big enough to produce conclusive results.

Hannibal didn't talk to him and Will didn't blame him. He did, however, give him a pained squeeze on the shoulder before going out to join the search party, scanning the state for any sign of Abigail passing through.

A week earlier Will would've believed it. Wholeheartedly. He had crawled inside Garrett Jacob Hobbs' head and couldn't get out; he would see things that weren't there, sleepwalk for hours at a time, act strangely on crime scenes. A week earlier he could be told that he assassinated the queen of England in his sleep, and it'd sound reasonable. Now that his mind was clear, he had doubts. The menacing figure of Abigail's father seemed farther than ever, left behind in the past where he belonged, not living inside of Will's head.

Hannibal must've arrived at a similar conclusion, because by the time he got back home, late into the night, his face was softer, even apologetic.

"You stayed up waiting for me. Thank you."

The sound of those words instead of begrudging silence filled Will with relief. He wouldn't be able to face this on his own, and couldn't think of anyone else to get him through it. Well, Alana Bloom already had his dogs at her place. Surely she wouldn't mind their owner joining them. Or keeping them for a few more weeks, months, or years as he awaited trial and, if push came to shove, was then swiftly sent to prison or a mental institution.

"You don't really think I'd be able to sleep tonight."

"No."

"Any developments?"

"None so far." Hannibal walked up to the fireplace, where Will was sat, staring blankly into the flames. "If the police gets the search warrant, and they will… Is there anything they will find that I should worry about?"

"No. Even if they get through all the dog hair," Will scoffed. "And why should you worry about it, anyway?"

“You were in my house when Abigail disappeared. You and her both, if she was really here.”

“You think I dreamed her?”

“I’m not sure what I think. But either way, that makes me an accomplice.”

“You weren’t here.”

“Not then. But I’m going to stick by you.”

“So you believe I didn’t kill her?” Will raised his eyes.

“I love you.”

“Not exactly what I wanted to hear right now,” Will smiled weakly. “But I’ll take it.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading and interacting with this little thing! I love all the comments I get. Hopefully I can keep up the pace of posting once every two weeks, or once a week if possible. Stay safe everyone <3

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> There's consensual sex in this chapter for a change. Well, as consensual as it can be while Will still doesn't know Hannibal is the Chesapeake Ripper. Enjoy the products of my fucked brain anyway.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The time for Hannibal Lecter to prove his love came not long after, when the remains of Cassie Boyle, Marissa Schurr and Georgia Madchen had been discovered in Will's fishing equipment, propped up like the trophies they were. Will barely had time to process the information before he was in Hannibal's Bentley and driven away from his previous life.

If Hannibal's clenched jaw was anything to go by, Alana would have to spend a lot more time playing dog nanny. He had no illusions about her being able to keep all of them long term. He only hoped she'd find them loving homes and wouldn't be forced to give them up to a shelter. She was a good person who loved animals. She could probably take care of two, maybe three.

Abigail Hobbs had been cut into pieces and the person who did it to her planted dead girls' hair in his house, but the most painful thing for him to think about was the sight of his rescued strays stashed away in cages, abandoned all over again. But since Will has always seen their fates as interconnected, maybe if he could succeed in running away, his family wouldn't have to be locked away, either.

It all happened very quickly.

One moment, Will wasn't even a suspect in the case of the murder of Abigail Hobbs; a murder which at the time was still only a disappearance. The next, Hannibal was dropping two duffel bags full of personal belongings on the floor to him, announcing that he took everything he was able to before Will's house was completely closed off as a possible crime scene. Jack's unwavering trust in Hannibal's friendship and professionalism was the only reason Will wasn't leaving his life behind in nothing but a pair of pyjamas and socks that were too big for his feet.

The thought of moving – again – has been enough to make Will's head spin in the most quiet of times. It made him feel like he was the ten-year-old with no friends at school and no room of his own again. He struggled with it every time his work required him to travel out of state. It threw him for a loop and made him want to ask Jack is he could stay for a little longer this time, the way he would his father. It didn't help with the mental toil that already came with the job.

Work aside, it didn't really bother him. The pathological dislike for moving around was just another one in the arsenal of things that made him unrelatable to others. And were he required to discuss travel plans, six dogs made for a convenient excuse.

Well, no excuse would get him out of this one.

Hannibal was as wonderful as ever, like the time he got him through that fateful night at the office without harm or humiliation. He let Will help pack some medical equipment and get bags in the car while he picked his clothes, allowing him to feel useful, like a co-conspirator, instead of a helpless victim of circumstance. He didn't speak much, but let the love he had confessed the night before shine through in small glances and painful smiles. He knew how much the escape itself would affect Will and acted accordingly. It made Will feel seen.

The FBI knew exactly where Will was staying and trusted Hannibal to keep him in place, so they didn't have much time. Hannibal packed light, but still managed to squeeze some kitchen equipment in the trunk.

Will didn't take well to the trip. It was still too much of an exertion to his recovering body, which protested with its usual routine of fever, shivering and nausea. He was horrible at being a fugitive. Hannibal fed him all kinds of pills, played soft classical music on the radio and only checked his phone about ten times when they were forced to stop at the side of the road. Finally, about forty minutes away from Baltimore, with Hannibal anxiously checking the rear-view mirrors, he dozed off to sleep and dreamt of their car hitting a giant deer carcass swarming with flies.

He woke up when they crossed state lines, before midnight. The forest landscape made him think that he was just getting home from work for a second. When the reality came back to him, it crossed his mind to ask Hannibal if they could take a detour, just for a moment, so he could say goodbye. But of course, his house was surrounded by cops and his family wasn't there. Going to Alana's house to say goodbye was impossible. He'd just have to get used to home being two duffel bags and the man behind the steering wheel. Again.

He'd also have human family, again. Shame that it didn't go the way Hannibal had planned, with Abigail in the backseat. It would be so much better with the three of them. The more, the merrier.

It must have shown on his face, because Hannibal moved his hand from the steering wheel to squeeze Will's fingers.

"We'll be there soon, dear. How are you feeling?"

'Be where?,' thought Will, and 'don't call me that,' but all he could say was:

"I don't think I'm about to have a seizure, so in these circumstances I'd say great."

"That's good to know. If you had a seizure right now we could end up in an accident."

Will managed to summon a smirk. A little banter felt good. Almost as if they were en route to check out a regular murder scene and not to a whole new life God knows where. Or to prison,

in case they got caught.

“Where are we going?” He asked, figuring now was his best shot.

“A safe place I know. We’re going to lay low and rest just until our flight.”

“A flight. To where?” South America first came to Will’s mind, naturally. Could be some remote country in Europe. That’s where Hannibal would feel more comfortable. A life in the middle of nowhere, somewhere in a vast European forest didn’t seem so bad.

“You’ll have to forgive me for withholding that information from you.” Hannibal’s thumb rubbed the top of his palm. “In case we become separated. I have to think of myself, and this would implicate me.”

“This isn’t the first time you’re doing this.”

“No, it isn’t.”

It’s been on his mind since Hannibal handed him the duffel bags. His mind kept wandering back to the patient whose death was the decisive factor in doctor Lecter switching careers, but he wouldn’t be talking about it so loud if what he described as killing was not, in fact, just a failure to save an already slipping life. Although talking about it the way he did could be a strategy to draw attention away from it. Or there was more to it, hidden in the basement of his mind, that may or may not have been connected to his ended surgeon career, his secret sex life and the instant connection he had with Abigail Hobbs, daughter of a murderer.

What was the most likely was that Hannibal’s lavish lifestyle came at the expense of a tax fraud or two.

“What the hell did you do?”

“I’ll tell you one of these days. Just not now.”

Maybe not tax fraud, then. Or it had been a scheme so elaborate it required an entire evening with a tumbler of whiskey by the fireplace. That would be in character; a tale of an amazing fortune, scandals and the dark underbelly of the high class. Hannibal’s old-worldliness came with its whole package of a dark past, and every time Will reached out to his mind, he found himself in an abyss. It could be dangerous knowledge, like a mafia. Will wouldn’t put it past him.

“Were you in a mafia?”

“What makes you think I was in a mafia?”

“You’re European.”

“I’m from Lithuania, not Sicily.”

“I never knew that.”

“This whole time, you mistook my accent for an Italian one?”

“No. Just didn’t know you were from Lithuania. You never told me.”

“Do you know where Lithuania is?”

“In Europe?”

“Smart boy.”

Lithuania. He’s heard the name before, of course, but it was elusive enough to sound like the name of a fantasy land to his ears. Lithuania, the post-Soviet magic kingdom of fairies and rare creatures names Hannibals. Didn’t sound all that bad.

*

The one named Hannibal Lecter lies in wait in the dark, his keen eyes open wide enough to see right through it. He doesn’t move a muscle, his breaths are calm and deep. Hannibal Lecter waits. He has big plans for the night.

The roadside hotel is subpar. Not rundown by any stretch of the word, oh no, he’s not a masochist (not usually). But it’s not what he’s used to, either. First of all, the décor is horrendous. Hannibal was more than happy to turn the lights off and not have to look at it anymore. Second, the shower is one of those dreadful inventions which can only run either steaming hot or freezing cold water, but never a combination of the two. It was the worst shower Hannibal’s had in a while. And third and worst of all, he found cigarette burns in the carpet right next to the bed. It would bother him for the rest of the night.

At least Will Graham probably feels right at home. A luxury hotel would make him feel uncomfortable. Good for him that most of those are neither safe nor discreet.

Hannibal estimates the time. If everything went according to plan, right now, as he’s laying awake in the dark and Will Graham is tossing and turning in the other room, Jack Crawford is discovering a crime scene. Poor doctor Lecter, he was trying to help Will Graham right until the last second, but got too close and was murdered in his own bed. And Jack Crawford had pushed him right into the arms of a dangerous maniac whose mind was not that of a skilled profiler, but of a cold-blooded murderer. Jack won’t be able to live with himself, first Abigail, now this, not to mention all the other innocent lives taken prematurely and turned into twisted trophies. He won’t rest until he finds Will Graham and brings him to justice with his own hands, one way or another.

Which means Will Graham won’t be able to go out of hiding for a long, long time.

Hannibal would have to restrain himself from breaking him completely. Will would fall apart with the beauty of the most splendid firework display the world has seen, but then he’d have to be discarded. And there was so much more Will Graham could be than a broken toy. He could be Another One. There could be two of them together, if only he was patient and played his cards right.

But tonight Hannibal can't wait anymore to hold Will Graham in his arms again. Run his fingers on his flesh. Admire him like a precious teacup. Hannibal Lecter has a lot of self-control, which is exceptional for someone in his line of work. He's not like the other swine who kidnap and murder women for fun. But even he finds himself unable to resist some temptations.

The encephalitic crisis is his favourite scene to replay over and over in his mind palace, even as he's in the same room as Will, at arm's length. The weight of his burning hot flesh resting on his chest and cradled in his arms. The sickly sweet smell of his unwashed hair, the pale fingers clutching his shirt like a lifeline. Hannibal has probably never found himself so connected to someone's mind and body at the same time. Only Bedelia ever came close, and her company was nothing like the full connection he saw the potential for in Will Graham. They could melt together into one wondrous creation.

Will has not taken kindly to their journey. He's still sick. Autoimmune encephalitis is not something you can fully recover from in a week. He's far away from home, and his world has fallen apart. He's lost everything that made him who he was.

There's nowhere else for him to go.

And sure enough, after a few more minutes tick by, the door handle to Hannibal's room moves.

They got a two bedroom suite, but Hannibal made a point of letting Will know his door will be left open throughout the night in case anything happens. It wouldn't work in a two-bed room. He needs Will to come to him.

A triangle of yellow light seeps over, illuminating the disgusting carpet. Will lingers in the doorway, considering his next move. Hannibal can hear him breathing. He can smell the hotel's sharp two-in-one shampoo and body wash, Will's hot, sweetly sweat and the darker, earthier notes of his flesh underneath it all, almost covered by the chemicals he rubbed on it. And it's so close, so intense, Will might as well be in bed with him.

Will decides Hannibal is definitely asleep and four quiet footsteps hit the carpet, like the claws of a frightened prey animal. Something drops to the floor, large and heavy but soft. He brought his own duvet, the poor thing. Will curls up on it and covers himself with the other half. He'll be something great eventually, but to be able to get him there, Hannibal needs to make them co-dependent; and now Will is a hunted dog at his feet.

Hannibal stirs with a sharp inhale, pretending to be waking up from a deep sleep.

"Will. What's wrong?"

Will raises his head slightly. Caught! Trapped! Nowhere to run away from his humiliation.

"Sorry. I thought you were asleep." He stumbles over his words, as if creeping into someone's room while they're asleep made it any better. He couldn't find an excuse on the spot, couldn't even acknowledge his attachment to Hannibal which he knows full well is requited. Always a bit awkward. Will can't function in a normal, petty human society. The

only time he thrives is when taken away from it and thrust into a darker, more meaningful world. Hannibal intends to steal him away from where he's so uncomfortable and put him back where he was meant to be from the start.

"Are you feeling ill?"

"Yes, and I came here to puke specifically on your carpet." There he is, his beautiful, angry boy, who's had enough politeness. "I'm sorry, Hannibal. I feel awful. I can't sleep."

"That's not surprising. We could have shared a room if you've told me anything."

Will shoots him a desperate look, begging him to stop with the act of a caring therapist when that's not their situation here. Will never asks for anything, except to be left alone. He's used to being an oddity at best and a nuisance most of the time.

"Will." The name is just like honey on his tongue. "Talk to me."

"The night I… The night Abigail went missing. Did you find anything?"

"I wasn't the one to find her finger, if that's what you mean."

"No, I know that. I mean in the house."

"Nothing but you, sleeping in your bed." That much is true, to the extent Hannibal is willing to reveal so far. "As of now, there is no proof that you've hurt her. And there never was."

Will is considering the possibility that Hannibal, madly in love with him, is covering up the traces of his crimes, that he's willing to sacrifice Abigail and other young women for this affair. Which is not a bad turn of events for Hannibal. His devotion shouldn't be underestimated. Being in love, whatever that means for Will, is not too far from his real feelings, anyway. Bedelia would call it a dangerous obsession. Hannibal simply considers it a normal reaction to meeting someone capable of understanding one's mind for the first time.

"Who's doing this to me?" Will spits out in an angry, desperate whisper. His voice is shaking. His illness, exhaustion and despair combined put him on edge. Good. "Do you know? Is that why you took me away?"

Hannibal strategically doesn't say a word. Will is not aware of that, but he can see his face convulsively contort. Then Will rubs his eyes, trying to stop them from tearing up. Seducing someone by letting them cry on your shoulder after a dramatic event is the oldest trick in the book and Will should know that. He's seen through manipulation much more subtle than this.

Hannibal moves over and pats the spot on the bed next to him anyway.

"Come sit. I hate to see you on the floor." He loves it. If he had his way, he'd join Will right there on the carpet and rub a few new holes in it. Alas, he must be patient.

Will's breath quickens. He wants to escape. Hannibal won't let him.

"Will. Come on up. This is nothing more than whatever you're comfortable with."

Will frantically nods in the dark, wraps himself up in the duvet (which was on the carpet a second ago – filthy, filthy boy) – for protection or to hide himself, Hannibal doesn't care which, and sits down the edge of the bed. It's an assault on Hannibal's senses. Just the way the mattress bends under Will's weight could send him insane.

But Hannibal sits motionless, back against the headrest.

"Jack Crawford? Frederick Chilton?" Will's voice, shaking and breathy, is barely audible. "Jack Crawford? Fucking… Fucking Freddie Lounds?" The last name comes out of him in a desperate, high-pitched sob, and now he's crying, cradling his head in his palms and rocking back and forth. For a moment there, Hannibal fears he might experience another seizure instead of throes of pleasure at his hands, but then Will turns around and stares him right in the eye, holding back another sob. "Promise you won't leave me. Promise that you know I didn't do it."

Hannibal can feel every tremble of his body in his bones, every panicked exhale on his face. What he truly wants is to get Will Graham out of his body, out of his head and let him share his own. Find a bit of peace. He also wants to slap him across the face, push him down to the floor and tear him to shreds to quicken the process.

What he does is pull Will into his arms with a whisper, hot and filled with emotion, of "I promise".

At first Will stiffens, like a little scared animal, stray pet, not used to being held by a human being. Hannibal has touched him many times during the week of wonders they shared at his house, but only in ways that were appropriate or necessary. The time Will dissociated enough to allow his hair to be washed, unfortunately, didn't repeat itself. Hannibal didn't dare invade his personal space in such intense way after that.

After a few moments of Hannibal whispering promises and rocking back and forth ever so slightly, Will's muscles relax and his hand wanders up Hannibal's back to return the embrace. Hannibal sticks his nose in Will's hair and inhales. Its smell is sickly sweet underneath the artificial citrus of the hotel shampoo. Will's still burning up, shivers in Hannibal's arms. He pulls him closer to bury his bare arms in the warmth of the duvet and his soft pyjamas.

Will pulls away, only to take Hannibal's face in his hands and look deep into his with a burning gaze, more intense than anything he dared show during their sessions or shared meals, no matter where the conversation lead. He pants as if he just endured a marathon, not an embrace. His fingers burn Hannibal's cheeks.

He's on the verge of a panic attack, Hannibal realises, or already in the throes of one. This amount of physical contact didn't help, even if normally Will doesn't mind it from his friend. Hannibal needs to watch his step here.

But the decision on how to proceed is made for him when Will smashes their lips together, breaks Hannibal's upper lip with his teeth and pushes his tongue inside his mouth. Hannibal can taste dry toothpaste, tears and his own blood on the kiss. It makes him ecstatic.

After their initial clash, Will is slower, more sensual, tries to run his hand through Hannibal's hair. It hurts to push him away when he's trying so hard to be sweet and appealing. It leaves Hannibal cold.

"Feeling unstable?"

"How do you think?", Will retorts and lowers his palm to the back of Hannibal's neck. "You're the one who invited me to your bed."

"Because you're ill. You need help. And I said that it doesn't have to mean anything."

"Does that mean it can't?"

There is a thrill to seducing this beautiful creature while he's still unaware of who exactly he's gotten into bed with, but Hannibal can't wait for what their intimacy may look like once the truth comes to light. He runs his hand down Will's back, over his cheap cotton t-shirt, one of Will's entire collection of identical ones. So cute.

"I guess it doesn't," Hannibal starts to speak, but before he can even ask if this is Will's idea of distraction and if he sees Alana Bloom the same way to taunt him, Will is kissing him again, except with even more eagerness this time. He crawls into Hannibal's lap, rubbing his hypnotising scent all over the sheets, Hannibal's clothes, his skin. It's the thick and heavy smell of arousal. Will is hard and immediately starts rubbing his erection against Hannibal's groin. His body is strong and insistent, yet it feels malleable, willing to be handled and give up the control of the situation to his partner. His cheeks being still damp with tears doesn't help. What a beautiful disaster Will Graham is.

Hannibal allows himself to succumb to the ecstasy he's been denying himself for too long, to all the scents and flavours surrounding him, to the touch of the other's skin and clothes all over. Will is only a few inches shorter and just a bit slimmer, with less fat on his body, but their age difference and this situation makes him seem unbelievably small to Hannibal. So small he could easily be devoured in one bite.

Hannibal reaches down between their bodies and Will wraps his arms around his neck, missing the point of contact on his back and wanting to be closer. With an obscene snap of the boxers' band, Hannibal uncovers Will's cock and runs his fingers along its length. It comes to life under his hand with a twitch.

"Like what you see?", Will gasps, breaking the kiss, and pushes his fingers down Hannibal's pyjama pants. He has the rough hands of a physical worker, not those of a teacher. A testament to his outdoorsy temperament. He's going to like their next temporary hideout.

"Who taught you such cliché dirty talk?", Hannibal asks and slaps his hand away to rub their dicks together. Will's eyes actually roll back at that.

"No one. God. I haven't had sex in years."

"It shows. Eager boy."

“That’s just because I’m soo…” Will closes his eyes and grinds against Hannibal with an exaggerated move of a stripper. “…Unstable.”

“Now, that sounds more like you.” Hannibal rubs both of their members with his hands to encourage the good behaviour.

“Instability?” Will moans and immediately covers his mouth with the back of his hand. Cute, awkward, unstable Will. “Or talking dirty about my mental state?”

“Both.” Hannibal bites his earlobe, hoping to elicit more obscene sounds out of him, but all he gets is a grunt. Will got himself too under control. Shame. “You’re wonderful. Everything about you.”

“Stop,” Will seeks out his lower lip and tugs on it with his teeth in revenge. “I’m going to blush.”

“You’re already blushing.”

“That would be the fever.”

Hannibal chuckles.

Will. Will. Will. His entire world belongs to Will. Will’s smell, Will’s taste, Will’s clothes, soaked through with sweat and pre-ejaculate. Will in his bed. Will sitting in his lap. With his oversensitive senses, it feels as if the younger man crawled right under his skin and into his ribcage, to join him and together make one perfect creature. Hannibal feels euphoric. He has to bite his tongue not to ruin it by blurting out his real identity. He’s fully aware that at this stage, instead of turning the moment into the realisation of his deepest desires, it would destroy it.

“I love you,” is the truth he whispers instead, pressing Will against his chest and rubbing his face against Will’s neck. Will allows it, holds him tight. His breath quickens and hitches in his throat, and Hannibal can’t tell if he’s crying or coming, or both.

It turns out to be the second one when he feels the warm splash on his belly. Way too soon, but he resignedly follows suit and lifts the other’s body from himself.

“Will you be able to sleep now?” Hannibal realises he sounds dismissive, but Will doesn’t seem to care. He just nods weakly and lays down on Hannibal’s pillows. By the time Hannibal returns with a damp towel (the parallel is not lost on him), his companion is asleep. He cleans and covers them both, taking Will into his arms, and breathes in the smell of their sex until morning.

He wakes up to Will’s hair tickling his nose and almost one hundred missed calls.

Chapter End Notes

A big thank you again to all my readers for all the likes and comments, and especially for patience! My life is absolutely hectic, but at least the situation at work has calmed down a little.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

> I'm back! I'm not dead! Will and Hannibal go to Poland, which started completely as a joke. Hope I don't offend any of my Polish brethren.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will doesn't know anything about Poland, except that it being invaded by Nazi Germany had kickstarted World War Two and that their president died in a big plane crash in the early 2010s. Hannibal doesn't correct him that it was exactly 2010. It's a very childish and primal impulse, to withhold as much information from him as possible, even such insignificant details. It feels like Will is smart enough to use every bit of knowledge to eventually escape from his grasp, if he finds out too much too soon.

Will's eyes grow wider and wider as Hannibal explains that Vilnius, where he comes from, used to be a part of Poland, and his parents taught him the language, even though his family comprised of mostly Lithuanians, with an occasional Polish noblewoman further up the family tree.

Will doesn't have a family tree. Never even knew his mother, not to mention any grandparents, aunts or uncles. It's like he had appeared out of nowhere and had been taken in by a random man on a lake boat somewhere in Louisiana. It's hard to even tell whether he's *from* Louisiana – his father, at least, came there to work from a different part of the country. A very American way to be.

Will is less surprised to find out that Hannibal had lived in Poland for three years in his youth, studying in Warsaw, Cracow and Lublin. These names don't tell Will anything. To him, it's just another part of Hannibal's European past, a part of a continent Will has never seen and didn't expect to see.

Will sleeps at the airport. Like many insomniacs, it's easier for him to sleep when he's not supposed to. Hannibal enjoys his silent presence. His steady breathing. His. Will is his, even if not fully yet. Having control over someone's luggage and travel destination doesn't exactly equal possession, but Hannibal will settle for now.

Will sleeps through most of the twelve hour flight, too. The journey is draining more and more of his newly recovered strength. Hannibal draws, writes and plans out the first days of their new life together. He wants Will to be rested for when they arrive at their destination and he gets to see their new hideout.

Hannibal would love to relive his academic days, wander the narrow streets of those wonderful Eastern-European cities and blend in with the crowd gathering around universities

– something he was never able to do in the U.S. It's a shame that it must wait. They need to lay low for as long as appropriate.

Will, used to the grandiosity of his own country, barely pays any attention to Warsaw as the plane circles over the city. His eyes are glazed over. Hannibal whispers to him that they're almost home, but isn't sure if Will understands any of the words. He retreated inside his head, having reached the limit of his coping abilities. Hannibal's presence, so comforting to him in the previous life, is not enough to get him through it this time. Hannibal must be careful not to lose him now.

Will looks a little more present when they leave the airport. Warsaw surprises him with its worldliness, with how Americanised it is. Hannibal really wants to show him the other faces of the city, but that's another thing that must wait for at least a few weeks, if not months.

In their hotel room – one double bed, now that Will has successfully been lured inside it – Hannibal hooks his lover to his trusty IV. Will doesn't try anything with him that night, too exhausted to be nervous and needy. He curls up on his side of the bed and stares at the wall. Hannibal regrets having let him sleep on the plane. He tries to spark a conversation, but Will doesn't want to talk to him. What a disappointment. Hannibal braces himself for a tough twenty-four hours before they reach their actual destination.

Hannibal rents a car in the morning and Will falls asleep the second he starts the engine. It's beginning to feel like he's avoiding him on purpose. Him, or some conversation they might have. In this particular play-pretend, Hannibal feels like he's made his feelings clear, but perhaps it is their presence, not absence, that's troubling dear Will. He knows there's more to his friend than he lets on, hence the absurd allegation that he's in the mob. Or maybe not so absurd. Maybe Hannibal could use it to make this façade more believable for a while yet. When one leads a double life, the details are largely irrelevant and mechanisms largely the same.

Hannibal thinks back to the organ harvesting case, a hundred lifetimes ago, and Will seeing him wrist deep in someone's abdominal cavity. He's more than happy to let him figure out the truth. Just as soon as there's absolutely nowhere left for him to run.

They make a stop at a gas station. It's clad in white and red and the logo is the head of an eagle – a national symbol. Will stares at it in disbelief.

"Let me guess," he frowns at a giant stand featuring Robert Kubica, the only Formula 1 driver to come from Poland. "Hot dogs only come with garlic sauce and ketchup."

Those are the first words he's said since Warsaw, so Hannibal tactfully doesn't mention the American fondness for their flag. Besides, it's not like Will's a patriot. The only place he's remotely attached to is the home he had made for himself, which no longer exists, and hopefully his spot at Hannibal's side.

In the fresh morning air, Will becomes more animated. He insists on getting Polish hot dogs and laughs at Hannibal's distaste. Hannibal eventually rolls his eyes and takes a bite. It's horrendous. He feels absolute joy.

Will is more chatty the rest of the way. He makes a game of trying to pronounce the names of towns they pass through and being corrected. Hannibal starts to worry about him mapping an escape route, but quickly dismisses the thought as nonsense. Will won't be able to remember all the towns that go halfway across a country. And besides, he knows he's free to go whenever. No reason for an escape plan just yet.

They change cars. Hannibal didn't have time to make proper arrangements and the urgency was part of the plan, but he can't wait to finally drive something better than a Toyota Corolla.

Will keeps trying to play games, but the illness gets better of him eventually and he turns gloomy and sleepy again, pressing his aching head against the window.

"Do you want to talk about that night at the hotel?" Hannibal finally asks, taking an educated guess on what's bothering him, other than the half-treated encephalitis.

Will shrugs.

"Don't worry, you can't get pregnant just from that."

As much as Hannibal loves his deadpan humour, it can be absolutely grating at times.

"I hope you don't feel taken advantage of."

"If anything, I'm the one who took advantage."

"You were in a vulnerable position. Perhaps it was wrong of me to allow for us to continue after you kissed me."

"Hannibal, when am I ever not in a vulnerable position?" Will snaps. His forehead makes a quiet sound when he unsticks his head from the glass. "Having a weird brain and some sort of autism spectrum thing doesn't make me a victim. And I was lucid enough to know what I was doing."

"What about-"

"Getting in a car with you and driving across state lines doesn't make me your victim either, unless you think I owe you my body now. In which case, I'd like to get out."

And go where? Hannibal thinks, but instead turns on his therapist face.

"You do seem agitated about this."

"I'm agitated about everything," Will sighs.

"Are you nervous about our relationship in these new circumstances?"

"At least I'm pretty sure the circumstances won't get any worse." I can throw you in jail and go back to my life as if nothing happened, just to rub it in your face. Just to make you despise me. It would work just as well as making you love me. "What are you gonna do without your dungeon?"

Oh. There it is.

“That’s what you’re worried about? That I’ll make you do something you don’t want to do?” Will purses his lips together. Hannibal can barely believe how much it’s been bothering him. In a good way or a bad way? Sometimes with Will it’s hard to tell, he’s so disconnected from what he really wants. “Or that I won’t? That I’ll be gentle and sweet, and treat you like a precious teacup?”

He deeply regrets having to watch the road instead of Will’s face. He’s quiet for a good few moments until he finally speaks out.

“I’m having dreams about it.”

“About my basement?”

Hannibal still isn’t entirely sure what Will saw in that basement. Obviously not much, as it’s been a while since it had last been used and, like the rest of his environment, Hannibal made sure to keep the place spotless. At the same time Will Graham, profiling and forensics prodigy, would no doubt eventually connect the dots, which made Hannibal think he didn’t get far before his brain shut down, either from sickness or utter shock.

“I’m having dreams about you hurting me.”

“In a sexual way.”

“I’m having dreams that it’s exquisite.”

Hannibal Lecter briefly experiences a rare moment of humility as he realises he’s not entirely sure how one would go about performing sadomasochistic acts on someone without killing them in the process and making sure they enjoy it at the same time. The general idea, plus the priceless experience of having had bound, kidnapped and cut up people would have to get him through the conversation, but then again, he never had the goal of keeping his victim alive. Looks like he’s got a new research topic waiting for him at their destination.

“So you enjoy the pain.”

“All of it.”

Hannibal clenches the steering wheel. He’s holding a treasure and he’s not sure how to proceed, how to make sufficient use of Will’s confession of him enjoying pain and power games. It looks like he sees himself only on the receiving end of such attention, for now. Hannibal hopes Will is yet again shying away from the darker parts of his nature, lest he scares someone off even more than he already does, without trying.

“I can give it to you,” Hannibal chooses his words carefully. “All the pain and pleasure you can dream of.”

“Maybe let’s wait until we get there, though.”

“And until you’re feeling a bit better.”

Will scoffs. “I can’t believe encephalitis is ruining my life again.”

He’s not entirely wrong.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay - I've been extremely busy and pretty uninspired with too much going on in real life. Hope to get back on track and update every other week again! Thank you for all the kudos, bookmarks and comments <3

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

> I'd like to apologise for the delay yet again. I got Covid last week and I wish I was joking. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will thought it would be worse.

The cabin in the woods, which belonged to Hannibal and where no one had the right to bother them, wasn't all that different from his house in Wolf Trap. It took a lot of cleaning and was missing most furniture by the time they arrived, but Hannibal took care of that. Will was relegated to laying on a sofa, which temporarily served as their bed, and staring out the window. He couldn't ask for anything better in these circumstances. Getting to just sit and take nature in was the exact thing he needed at the time, to recover and cope with what had happened. He missed his dogs, but was getting used to the thought of possibly never seeing them again. Knowing they were in good hands was a comfort; even if Alana was convinced he was a murdered, she wouldn't let innocent animals suffer because of his actions.

Hannibal, on the other hand, was cold and miserable. During the first week he busied himself with the project of making the house habitable – ordering furniture and entire boxes of décor. Bedsheets, soft towels in beautiful colours and subtle soap dispensers which went with the wooden interior of the cabin arrived at their doorstep day after day. Sometimes Hannibal would take the car – a 2008 Mercedes, good enough for Hannibal without drawing the attention of everyone who would see it – and drive to the nearest town to get groceries. He was obviously distraught by the lack of nearby grocers offering luxury goods, but coped by making acquaintance with local restaurants and finding sellers offering fresh fish and other products. He had the kitchen running from day one. Apparently, it wasn't unusual for rich people to buy houses in those mountains to get away from civilisation and live closer to nature, as well as go on wild goose chases for the freshest trout available.

After the house was filled with heavy, wooden furniture and light décor to match, he took to sighing a lot and sniffling even more, clearly uncomfortable away from civilisation and unused to anything other than central heating. As soon as he was able, Will started to help around the house, but that was not the problem. Hannibal was painfully bored. He spent his days sketching (mostly Will laying on the sofa in various poses), writing in his notebook and lurking on the Internet, either checking the crime and investigation news, or getting familiar with the subtleties of the country, which has changed a lot since he last lived there. He watched the nature through the window, but wouldn't be convinced to go out hiking in the woods with Will, even trying to scare him with the prospect of a hunter mistaking him for a boar and shooting him. Will wasn't sure how that could ever happen, but Hannibal assured him that in Poland it was a common occurrence. Will figured out that perhaps hunting, much

like in the U.S., was just an excuse to go out drinking, except the Polish did a lot more drinking.

Drunk hunters or not, after about ten days of recovery Will couldn't take being locked inside any longer. Hannibal made sure to get them enough outdoor gear to survive a week out in the wilderness, perhaps in case they had to run on foot (or Hannibal simply didn't know much about survival, and assumed all that equipment would be necessary for them to take a walk around the house). That way, Will ended up with plenty of winter clothes, a really good pair of hiking shoes and even a small, subtle head torch. It kind of missed the point of a head torch, but guess Hannibal would hate for him to look silly.

The woods behind their cabin were splendid, and not at all like what he was used to back in Virginia. While confident in his abilities of outdoor survival, he could get lost in the thicket of fir and spruce. Its deep greens made the world seem colder, darker somehow. The language barrier and the removal from civilisation, itself so different from what he was used to, added to the mystery. He did see the boars from afar a couple of times, but no near-sighted hunters followed.

On one occasion, pretty late into the evening, he stumbled upon a creature he first thought was a hallucination; an enormous animal, horned, with a long beard and coat of fur. That's when he found out they were camping out near the habitat of the European bison. Hannibal didn't let him out of the house for two days after that, certain of the bison's proclivity for murder. On the plus side, he seemed calmer with Will around. Whether he was genuinely concerned with the dangers of the local fauna (or the human population) or just generally uncomfortable away from the comforts of his previous life was unclear. The soap dispensers certainly helped, but weren't the miracle cured they had both hoped for.

Will hadn't really considered how their escape would affect Hannibal before that. Up until this point, he was oddly comfortable with the entire situation, but now Will could see how much of that was adrenaline, now slowly leaving his body and letting his friend succumb to anxiety and paranoia. Mistaking someone for a boar? Normally Hannibal could definitely come up with something better to keep Will around, but Will was touch with how much his partner craved his company. He seemed happy about being able to sleep with Will every night, too, and took a liking to cuddling and spooning. That wasn't strange, considering how touchy-feely he could get back when they were almost strangers, but the tenderness and vulnerability of it did take Will by surprise. The few times they had sex after Will wasn't bed-ridden with encephalitis anymore was gentle and perfectly vanilla; they did much more kissing than fucking. When Will got too overwhelmed with how loved he felt, he went out to look for more strange Eastern European creatures.

He tried to bring up the topic of sadomasochistic activities, but Hannibal had set his mind on letting Will fully recover before exposing him to such dangerous acts, even long after he started going on long walks in the woods by himself.

Finally, one particularly warm February morning, when sun was shining through the trees and icicles were melting from the roof, Will grew tired of Hannibal wasting away, staring at an empty page in his sketchbook, and dragged him out of the house and into the snowdrift in front of their doorstep.

Hannibal barely had time to protest, but didn't forget to throw his sketchbook to the side, lest it got wet. He didn't say anything while Will was manhandling him, didn't make a sound stumbling through the doorstep and into the sparkling white snow; but when he landed on his back in the drift his eyes were wild, shining with something like understanding. It stopped Will in his tracks for a second. Something was off. Hannibal's gaze was telling him something, and he was not quite sure what, drawing a blank again, reaching out and coming back with nothing, just when he thought he had the other one figured out. The moment sparked between them and was gone the next second, dissipated with a grin.

"Is that what you like?" Will gasped out what he meant to say from the start. "You want to be thrown around like trash?"

"Not necessarily," Hannibal replied as if they were having a conversation over a cup of tea. "But if it's you, I'd consider the proposal."

"Does this look like a proposal?"

"Oh," Hannibal raised an eyebrow. "I thought you'd at least ask about my safeword."

Will frowned, then realised what Hannibal meant, and let go of his collar with a chuckle.

"Yeah, you're right. We should talk it over first. Which is what I've been trying to do."

Hannibal stayed in the snow for another moment before lifting himself up on his elbows and sweeping it off of his shoulders.

"Excuse me if I've been… distant," he said, grabbing the gloved hand that Will reached out to him and getting up. "I guess this change of pace is harder on me than I anticipated."

"Well, excuse me for throwing you in the snow, then."

"All is forgiven." Hannibal gesticulated towards the pile of wood lined up under the veranda roof (ordered from the nearby town – Hannibal wouldn't lower himself to chopping his own wood; God forbid, he might not be immediately successful). "Get some wood while we're here, would you? It's actually warmer outside than in the house."

Once warmed up by the fireplace and with a cup of hot tea in his hands, Hannibal was even more amicable. Will figured he must've felt lonely the past two weeks; not only did he lose all of his friends back in Baltimore, Will didn't provide much company, either. As soon as he was out of bed, he had started going out exploring, leaving his partner behind, all alone. Hannibal was human, as much as he liked to pretend otherwise. His worries about the animals and hunters were an excuse to keep his only companion by his side, and Will just brushed them off instead of being reassuring.

Assuming that was the case was the only way to get the strange moment they shared in the snowdrift out of his head.

"You haven't had much experience," Hannibal said, raising the teacup up to his lips, "with any fetish practices, am I right?"

That was an unusual conversation opener, but Will doubted they've ever shared one of those. Not even the first time they met – was it something about avoiding eye contact? Or about taste? Definitely relevant either to gruesome murders, or picking Will's brain apart.

"Fetish practices? Is that what you used to call it with your lovers, too?"

"Used to? There's no need to pour salt in the wound, Will. Here I have everything I need."

Then why did you fall into a depressive state?

"I would hope so. I'd hate to disappoint. What gave me away?"

"The way you speak about it, mostly." Hannibal stared into the flame. His eyes were definitely more shiny than before, more alive. Now that he saw him, Will figured 'fetishist' might not have been a bad word to describe Hannibal. "Like it's a dirty joke, something that could only exist in pornography. Not a hobby to indulge in."

"So when you're not throwing a dinner, you're indulging in bondage."

"More or less." Hannibal was becoming visibly excited; he rarely showed any emotion beyond dramatic circumstances, but Will was quickly learning to recognise them. The agitation seemed to pour out of every move of his fingers as he raised the teacup and put it down again. "I didn't want to speak to you openly about my interests before, because I was afraid of making you uncomfortable. Making you feel like this is a transaction, and not merely an act of friendship."

"We're not friends."

"Aren't we?"

"You don't want to be my friend. And I don't want to be yours, either." Hannibal smirked. Will walked up to his armchair and rested his palm on the armrest. "In case you haven't noticed, we're sleeping together. "

"I have, thank you. And I do love you." Hannibal's fingers brushed his. Will didn't doubt his words for a second, but it would take him a long time yet to place a word on his own feelings. "And sex is only one aspect of what I feel for you."

"You don't need to reassure me."

"I put you in these circumstances. Isolated you from the rest of the world."

"Somebody made sure I'd end up isolated either way."

Hannibal lowered his gaze with a sigh and collected himself.

"So, what shall we do about your dreams?"

Will had given it some thought, bracing himself for bringing the exploration out of his imagination and into the real world. He's never been particularly adventurous. Human

interaction was torturous to him on a good day as it was; discussing and negotiating kinks was something he simply couldn't imagine himself doing, until fate had brought him together with Hannibal Lecter and made sure they literally had nothing else to do.

The level of comfort he felt around Hannibal, as well as the other man's experience, allowed him to not hold back and lower himself to suggesting pink handcuffs or a silk rope.

"I want you to drink my blood," he said, deciding that that was his favourite.

Will could hardly find words to describe the look shared between them at that moment. Knowing, maybe. Seeing. The words that were technical, but didn't come close to the bond momentarily formed between their minds, only to float away the next second. Peeking under the curtain, gazing into the pond of murky water that was the soul of Hannibal Lecter.

"Pity," Hannibal replied, always so natural, so comfortable, as if Will just told him what he wanted for dinner. "I had just the right equipment for that back at home."

*

As wonderful as the equipment (a set of glass vials, tubes and pipes for very literally drawing and collecting blood) must have been, they had to make do with without it. Hannibal seemed very pleased with the idea and started making preparations right away, going as far as interviewing Will and making notes about his pain tolerance and comfort levels. This exact attitude was part of the reason why he was the only person in the world Will could trust in a potentially dangerous sexual situation; his stability, always knowing exactly what to do, when Will's brain felt like an open wound he couldn't trust just anyone to handle properly.

And thus, Will found himself laying on his stomach, in the bedroom they shared, on Hannibal's obscenely soft, bottle-green towel, with Hannibal's hands disinfecting the skin on his back. It was nothing like his masochistic dreams – in fact, now, when he was awake, in the yellow light of Hannibal's nightlight, feeling the warmth of Hannibal's body over his and the smell of disinfectant, Will was coming to the realisation that as arousing as they could be, those were nightmares. They were in the same category as the ones about being abused at the hospital and the ones about Abigail Hobbs dying in gruesome ways. His nightmares, it seemed, had a tendency to come true recently.

He tried to focus on Hannibal's hands instead, warm and clean, rubbing disinfectant over his left shoulder blade with a gauze pad. The shoulder blades, apparently, were safest spots to inflict pre-meditated injury. How convenient that Hannibal was a doctor, too. His expertise really came in handy. Will wondered if it had anything to do with how he got into BDSM in the first place; cutting into people and holding their lives in his hand on the daily, it could've been a coping mechanism.

An image slashed through his brain, sharp like a scalpel, of those hands cutting into- and left, as soon as it appeared, when Hannibal leaned back on the bed. Not unlike that day, in the ambulance, when he put his hand inside a man's stomach-

"Ready?"

Will nodded, urgent to get away from where his mind liked to wander.

“Yes. Go on.”

He could hear Hannibal picking up a scalpel, but not see it, which made the anticipation all the more exciting; he made a mental note to mention a blindfold next time.

“Here I go,” came a warning, ruining the surprise, but bringing with it more of a gleeful anticipation.

Will knew what a knife to the shoulder felt like and this was nothing like it. The blade in Hannibal’s skilful hand felt like tiny, sharp and freezing snowflakes landing on his back and melting away into a trickle of warm liquid. It was only then, with the warmth spreading through his spine, that it began to sting; an intense sensation, focused in a wound no bigger than a papercut. He leaned back into it, arching his back ever so slightly. Hannibal brushed the area around the cut with his fingertips. It made blood rush down to Will’s cock.

One of Hannibal’s gloved hands held him down by the shoulder, while the other gently pinched at the skin around the wound. Hannibal ran just the tip of his tongue over his back, catching the droplets of blood trickling down, before properly sucking down on the cut. The stinging sensation intensified with the burn of Hannibal’s warm mouth engulfing the painful spot. Will pressed tight against his chest until he could feel his heartbeat. Hear him swallow.

“How does it taste?”

“Warm and wild.”

“Do you want more?”

“Only if you’ll give it to me.”

So Will did, and Hannibal took, thirsty, wanting, greedy. Every little cut tingling, burning, pulling at his skin. Each a tiny cup for Hannibal to drink from.

And with every cut, Will kept grinding his aching dick into the towel a little more desperately, until it was too much, he was too close and turned around to beg for Hannibal’s helping hand.

What stared back at him was a creature covered in black blood, insane eyes shining with ecstasy, drunk on being allowed to tear Will apart and consume him. The blood-bathed man, who looked nothing like Hannibal, caught his gaze. He slid a bloody palm into his hair and leaned in for a kiss while reaching out the other hand to stroke his dick.

Will came with the taste of his own blood on his tongue.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for all the kudos, bookmarks and comments! Even if I take a while to reply, I read them all and they really motivate me in these trying times!
Also, my concept for this fic changed a little, so now I'm not sure how long it's actually going to be. Being my reader must take a lot of patience. I hope to compensate for it <33

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!